

COLOURED LIGHT

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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March 2007

Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Wendy F. Dracoulis

December, 2006

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SUMMARY

The *Coloured Light* project involves an investigation of geometric abstract paintings, kinetic sculptures and installations of the period between 1964 and 1980. Within this investigation the specific elements of colour and form are examined. Research emphasis is placed on static works that use colour and form to generate the impression of movement. The elements researched form the subject matter for a body of visual works within which the utilisation of digital technology is a major component. This utilisation of new media aims to demonstrate a continuity of historical painting processes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

In this project I examine abstract, geometric paintings, kinetic sculptures, electronic art and installations that use opticality, perspectival space and colour relationships that destabilise compositional cohesion. Works made between 1964 and 1980, particularly those by Victor Vasarely and Bridget Riley are referenced in the determination of how geometric forms, colour transitions, interactions and juxtapositions have been used to suggest movement. This enquiry includes a review of the usage of planar space and the creation of optical effects. Artworks such as Bridget Riley's *Chant 2*, (1967) inform new works in which I utilise available digital technological processes. These new works consist mainly of compositions of line and coloured forms and are created in response to the outcomes of the research into the selected works. For example, static works that create movement through the use of colour and geometric form inform the creation of new work in media that uses motion. The artworks produced are installation-based works. The works include digital projections and static images that use painting processes as well as digital media.

Objectives

My objective is to produce artworks that reference painting processes and extend explorations into colour usage designed to maximise optical effects and spatial disorientation. The artworks are intended to reflect elements researched whilst maximising the potential for using new media.

Aims

To review abstract geometric paintings, kinetic sculptures, electronic art and installations that use opticality, perspectival space and colour relationships to de-stabilise compositional cohesion. The period researched is between 1964 and 1980.

Artists researched include:

- Victor Vasarely – particularly the ambiguity of his forms in space achieved with the use of linear and coloured shapes and complimentary colours to produce optical effects. Examples can be seen in his paintings and kinetic structures called “Architectonic Integrations” eg. Hilton Hotel in Brussels, (1967), and “Homage to the Hexagon”, (1964-76).
- Bridget Riley’s paintings, in particular her early black and white works, 1961-67, for example, *Current*, (1964), *Exposure*, (1966) and her later colour works, 1967-80, including *Entice 2*, *Reef 2* and *Song of Orpheus 5*, provide examples of optical effects achieved through varying the colour, width and configuration of rectangles.
- Nam June Paik’s early works are reviewed and provide an historic background to developments in art using technology, eg. video installations, *Moon is the Oldest TV*, (1965), *Video Fish*, (1975).

To research contemporary artists who are investigating ideas of architectural space, spatial experiences and opticality including:

- Jim Lambie – his work aims to dissolve the line between object and space, eg. *Zobop*, 1999-2003.
- Tim Head – his recent work deals with electronic space and is concerned with a spatial reality intrinsic to the computer, eg. *Treacherous Light*, 2002.
- David Batchelor – his work with colour provides optical effects and has a physical, technological component, eg. *Electric Colour Tower*, 2001.
- Jennifer Steinkamp – uses digital technology in her installations and explores the dematerialising of interior and exterior architecture by manipulating light, space and movement, eg. *Stiffs*, 2000.

To research theories that will inform my practice including:

- Schmarsow's theory of *Raumgestaltung*¹, an historical concept of architectural space as a cognitive process by which spatial images are built up over time, a concept of space based on bodily movement through space rather than stationary perception of form. My intention is to extend the architectural concept to include installation-based digital artworks and review the relevance of this spatial theory to my art practice. Aspects of Schmarsow's theory inform the creation of works within this project.
- Vidler's idea of the psychological distortion of space². Phobias such as claustrophobia and agoraphobia constitute the psychological warping of space and demonstrate how the spaces around us are not confined to the physical space we occupy. I use aspects of Vidler's ideas to extend my review of historical spatial theory to include psychological aspects and look at how this may inform my art practice.
- Recent theories relating to space and digital technology. Dan Livingstone is researching the space between the 'assumed real' (physical space) and 'digital virtual' (screen-based representations).³ I use this concept of a space between two realities to inform my own practice.

To review optical effects in artworks within the period 1965-80, an example would be Vasarely's *Homage to the Hexagon* series. This review helps to determine how digital processes can be used to create apparently similar optical effects utilising motion in three dimensions using computer technology. I create methodologies within new media for interpreting the opticality of the artworks reviewed. These new methodologies aim to extend historic enquiry regarding optical effects, colour sensations, spatial movements and illusionism.

¹ Mitchell W. Schwarzer, 1991

² Anthony Vidler, 2000

³ Roy Ascott, 1999

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- In what ways can the properties of the artworks researched that use colour and form to suggest movement inform the creation of new artworks that use digital media and painting processes to explore issues of colour and movement in time?
- How can the visual sensations generated by static artworks that use opticality to demonstrate the illusion of movement be created and extended in works that use digital media incorporating motion and sound?
- In what ways can ideas of spatial distortions, psychological and optical, be used in digitally generated, time-based artworks?

RATIONALE

The use of digital media within the project extends explorations in contemporary art and assists in the understanding of digital technology as it relates to contemporary painting. Establishing links between digital art and painting can aid analysis and understanding of the digital medium as it relates to the specific issues of planar space, opticality and colour relationships.

The review of historical artworks within the period stated, with emphasis on the elements of planar space and colour usage, will result in the creation of new works that express a continuity of painting practices and include the use of new media technologies. An expansion of painting practice to include new media provides an opportunity to extend previous spatial investigations, eg. the sensation of movement in static works caused by form and colour combinations, to incorporate actual movement and created three-dimensional space. The inclusion of coloured light, along with colour as pigment, leads to further investigations of spatial concepts, for example, digital space within architectural space. The use of historical spatial theories to inform the creation of new installation-based digital projections enables the extension of enquiry into spatial issues within the practice of painting.

The artworks produced within the project that use digital technology express a continuity of purpose within the practice of painting. The project helps develop further understanding of artworks that use digital technology and attempts to encourage analysis and debate about the art and its historic continuance within the lineage of painting.

METHODOLOGY

March 2005 – September 2005

Background research

- The review of artworks concerned with abstract, geometric opticality, colour relationships and spatial issues including perspectival space - within the period between 1964 and 1980 to inform the creation of new work.
- Research colour theories, eg. Albers, Itten, theories of phenomenology, eg. Merleau-Ponty, (*Eye and Mind* 1961), and perception, Sturkin and Cartwright, 2001, and Bolter and Gromala, 2003.
- Research spatial types (eg. planar and perspectival) and spatial theories, including theories of spatial warping (eg. Vidler 2000) and architectural space (Schwarzer 1991).
- Review recent history and new theories relating to electronic art, (eg. Wilson 2002, Ascott 1999).

Studio work

- Experimentation with methods of production, media, format and computer software. Compile works, including digital prints. Produce short digital video clips using actual footage and digitally created footage. Use juxtapositions with multiple projections to review spatial ideas within architectural space.
- Preparation of work for the RMIT International Art and Science Exhibition (Shanghai & Hong Kong) in May 2005, involving production of small, screen-based video artwork. Preparation for participation in exhibition at Area Contemporary Art Space in August 2005 with this show consisting of two large-format digital projections, 4.5 x 4mts. Each show presents opportunities to test spatial ideas.

October 2005 – February 2006

Sound, Colour and Black and White

- The area of research involving colour uses simple rectangular blocks of colour, layered and set in motion. This initially was staged in a shallow digital space. A concurrent investigation uses black, white and shades of grey. Linear shapes, blocks and areas of tone and deeper 3D space are created. The underlying theme of this area of research is the exploration of theoretical and visual concepts of digital space.
- Introduction of sound. Experiments with sound methodology and positioning of sound within the video artworks including physical aspects of staging.

March 2006 – November 2006

Digital production

- With the development of a construction basis, it is possible to now create video footage that explores illusionist space, motion and opticality, including concepts researched earlier in the project, such as planar space and digital, screen-based space. Explorations include 3D spatial depth, with shallow and deep spatial constructions being made. Theoretical concepts of physical space and digital space researched inform the creation of works.
- Sound experiments are an integral part of the construction of video footage. Methodologies for the creation of sound for footage are varied and include the use of found sound recorded and digitally transferred to computer, and, digitally created sound. Essentially the sound component is created at the same time as the visual elements and is used as to enhance the spatial qualities of the created footage.
- Spatial distortions and opticality feature as overriding aspects of the inquiry concerned with planar space and illusionism.

Painting and kinetic sculpture

- Explorations are also conducted at this stage with paint on canvas. Using one frame from a created video artwork (*I Saw it Move*, 2005) that deals with illusionism and movement and uses curved, black and white, linear shapes I created a painting on canvas, 4' x 5'. The video footage demonstrates motion and illusionism using curved and flowing lines that afforded an appropriate composition for interpretation in pigment paint on canvas. Using a similar composition sourced from a frame of the same video artwork I conducted experiments with a kinetic sculptural work on a turntable set in motion with an electric motor. Aspects of Schmarsow's theories of bodily movement through space form the background to this inquiry.

December 2006 – March 2007

Preparation for examination includes the creation of approximately nine major artworks plus numerous secondary video works. The major works including *Pulse*, *Boxdance*, *V9* and *New Journey Long Way* are examples of the exploration of illusionist 3D space, colour and motion, opticality, planar space and sound.

Included in the works presented are digital prints. The digital format of the video artworks is enhanced by the presentation of digital prints that are captured from the actual footage. Each digital print is one frame from the created digital video artworks. The painting and kinetic sculpture are documented in the ADR.

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CV

2005 Australian Post Graduate Award recipient

Recent selected group and solo exhibitions

2006 *Siemens Fine Art Scholarship finalist exhibition* – RMIT Gallery

2005 *Fluoresce 2*, Area Contemporary Art Space Inc.

2005 *Various Presence* – Australian Art and Design Exhibition, Shanghai International Science and Art Festival, Shanghai and Hong Kong

2005 *Barker-Rance Art Prize* - Faculty Gallery RMIT

2004 *Venetians*, First Site Gallery - solo show

2004 '8' - Honours Painting and Drawing Exhibition – Faculty Gallery RMIT

2004 *Fluoresce*, Area Contemporary Art Space Inc. Fitzroy

2004 *Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)*

2004 *Commonwealth Games Village*

2004 *Siemens Fine Art Scholarship finalist exhibition* - RMIT Gallery

2003 *Siemens Fine Art Scholarship finalist exhibition* - RMIT Gallery

Recent studies

2005 - 2007 Master of Arts, Fine Art, RMIT

2004 Bachelor of Arts, Fine Art, Honours 1st class, RMIT

2000 - 2003 Bachelor of Arts, Fine Art, with distinction, RMIT

List of Illustrations

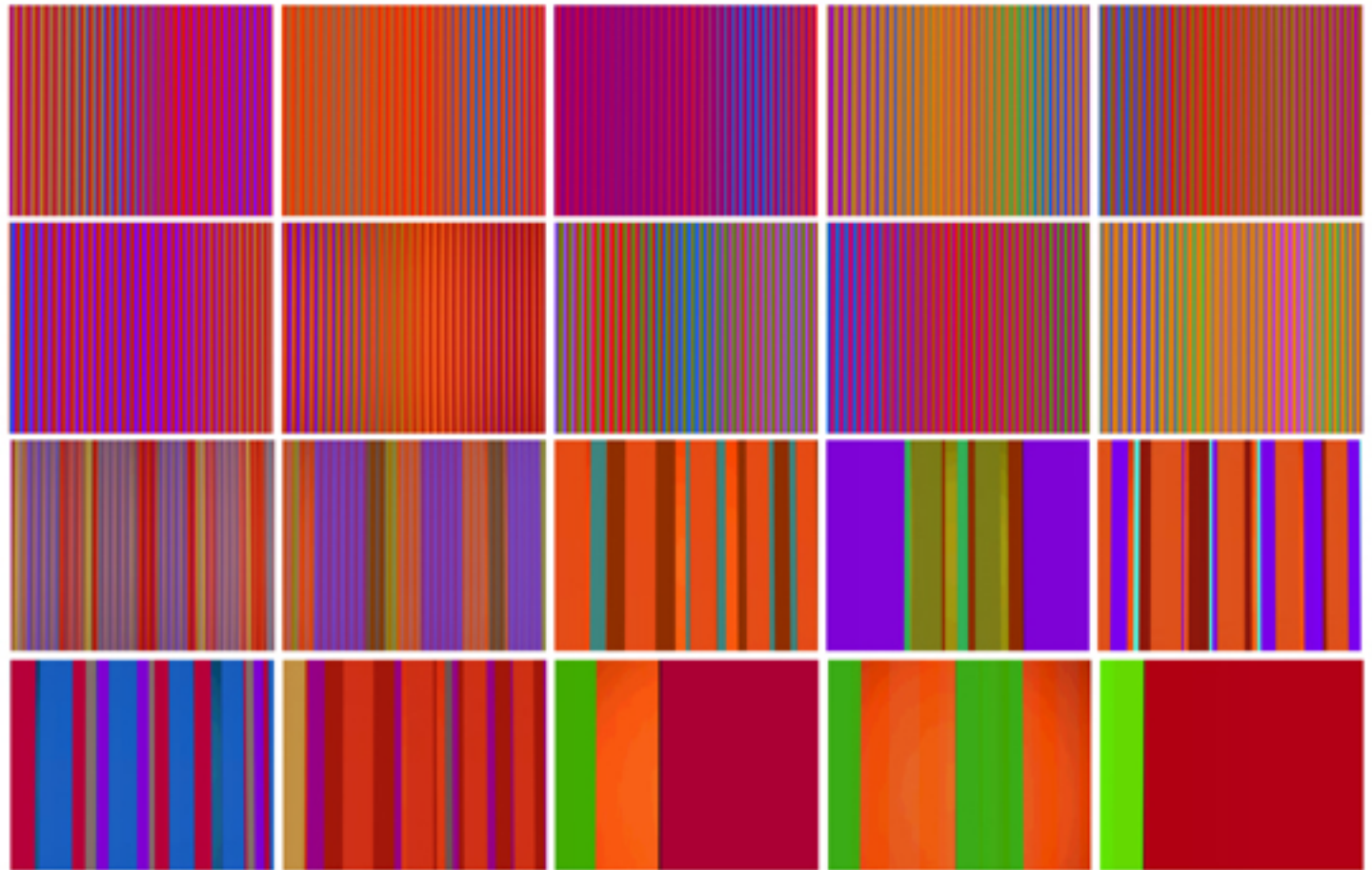
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Pulse

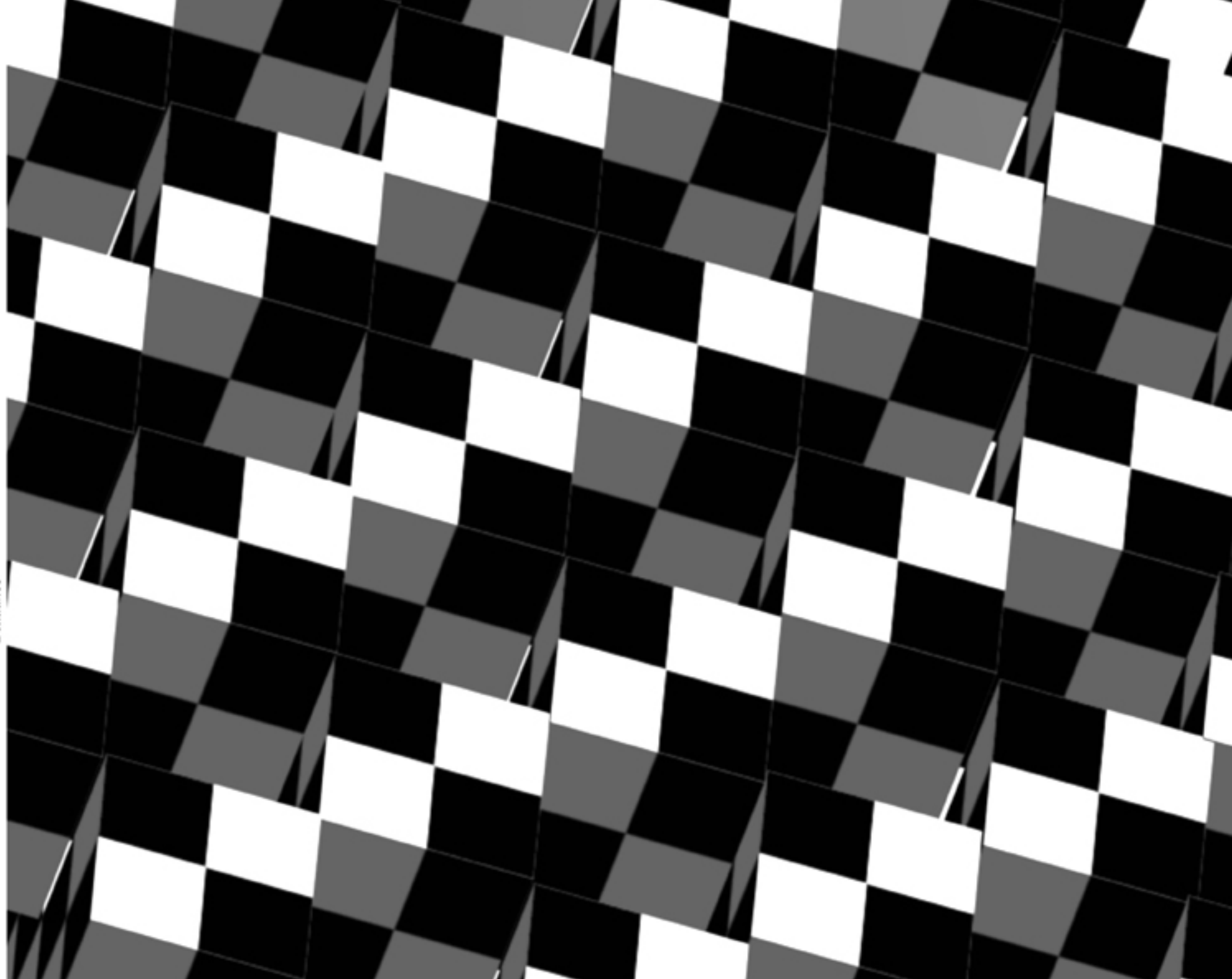


Selected stills

Pulse

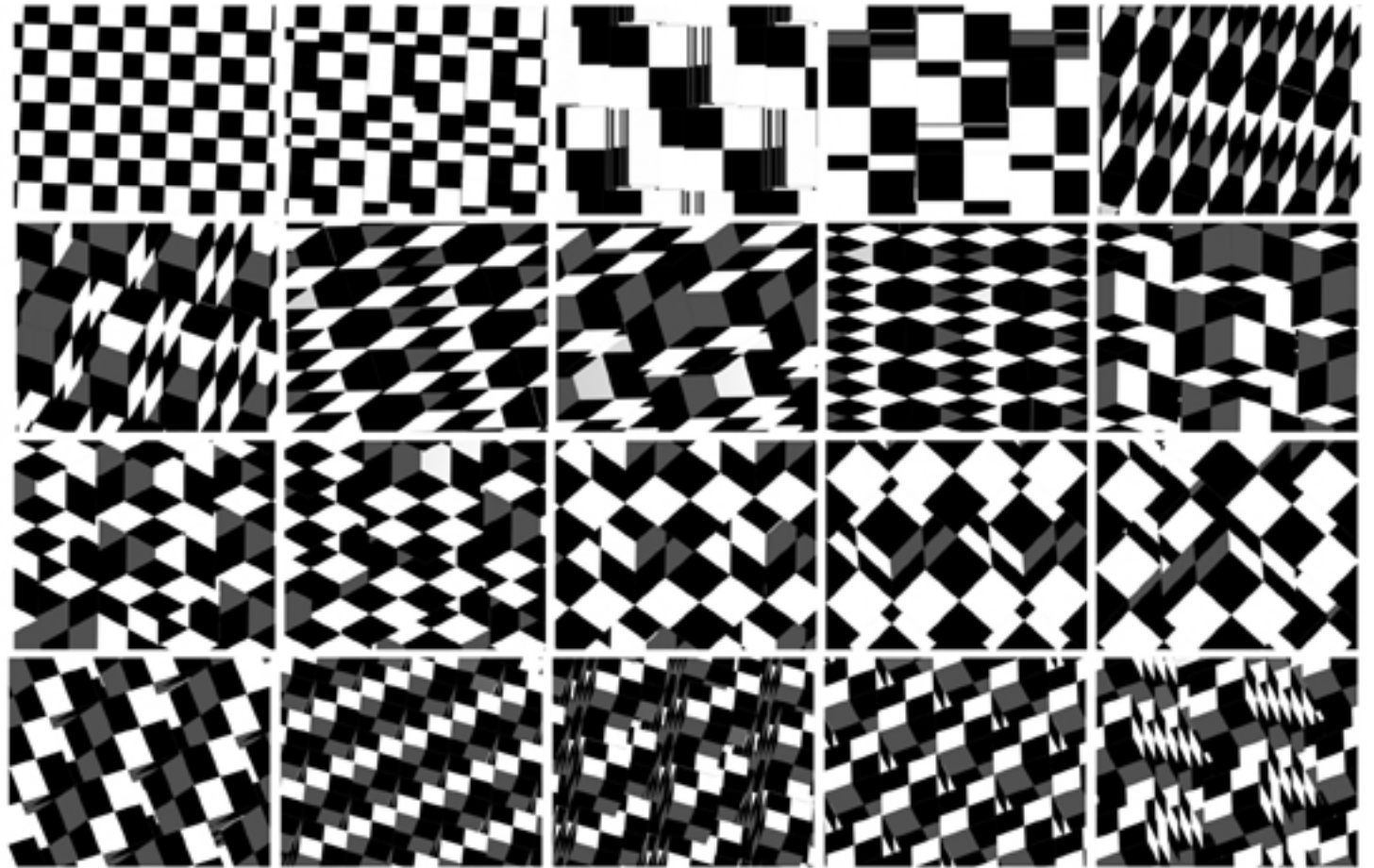


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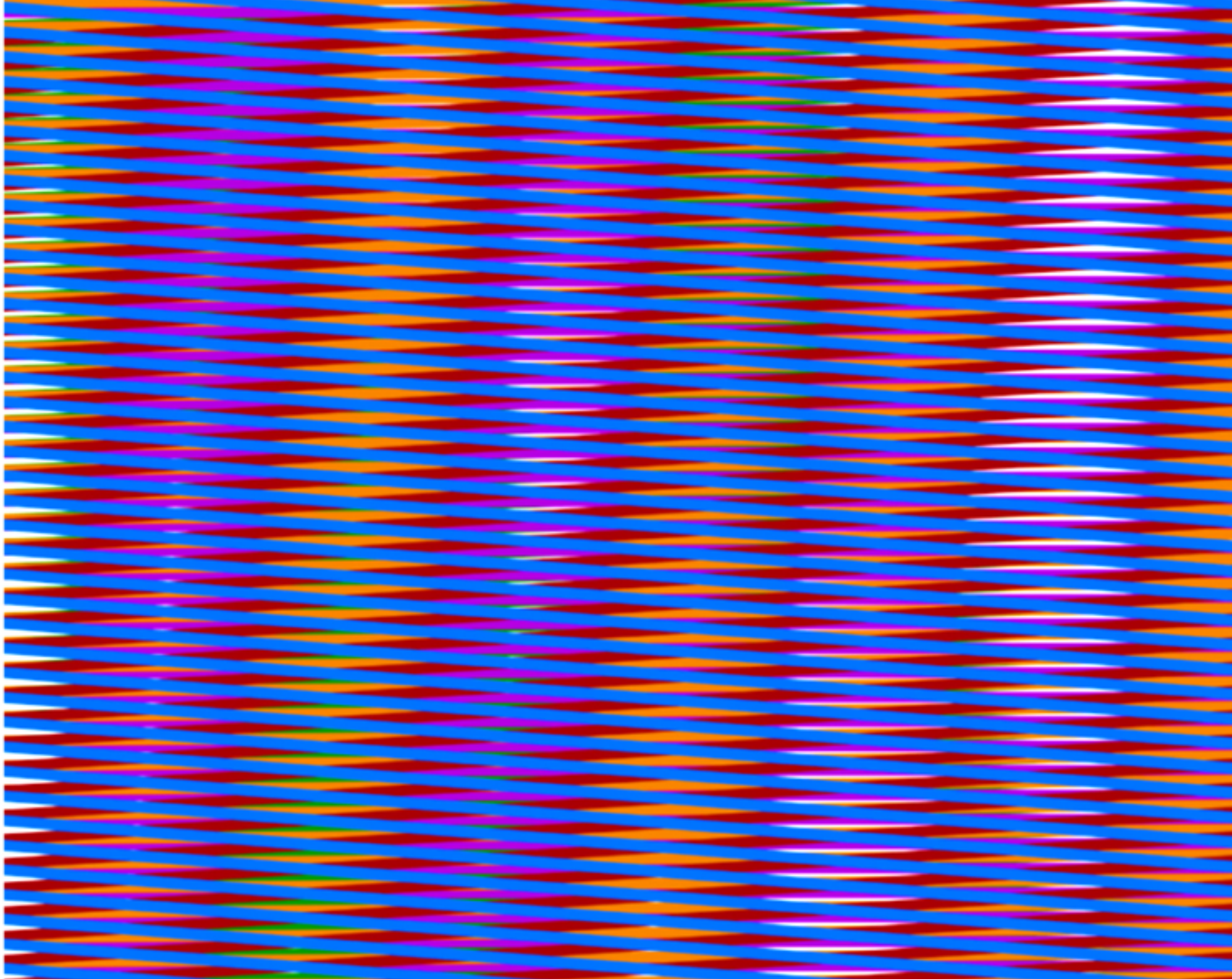


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Boxdance

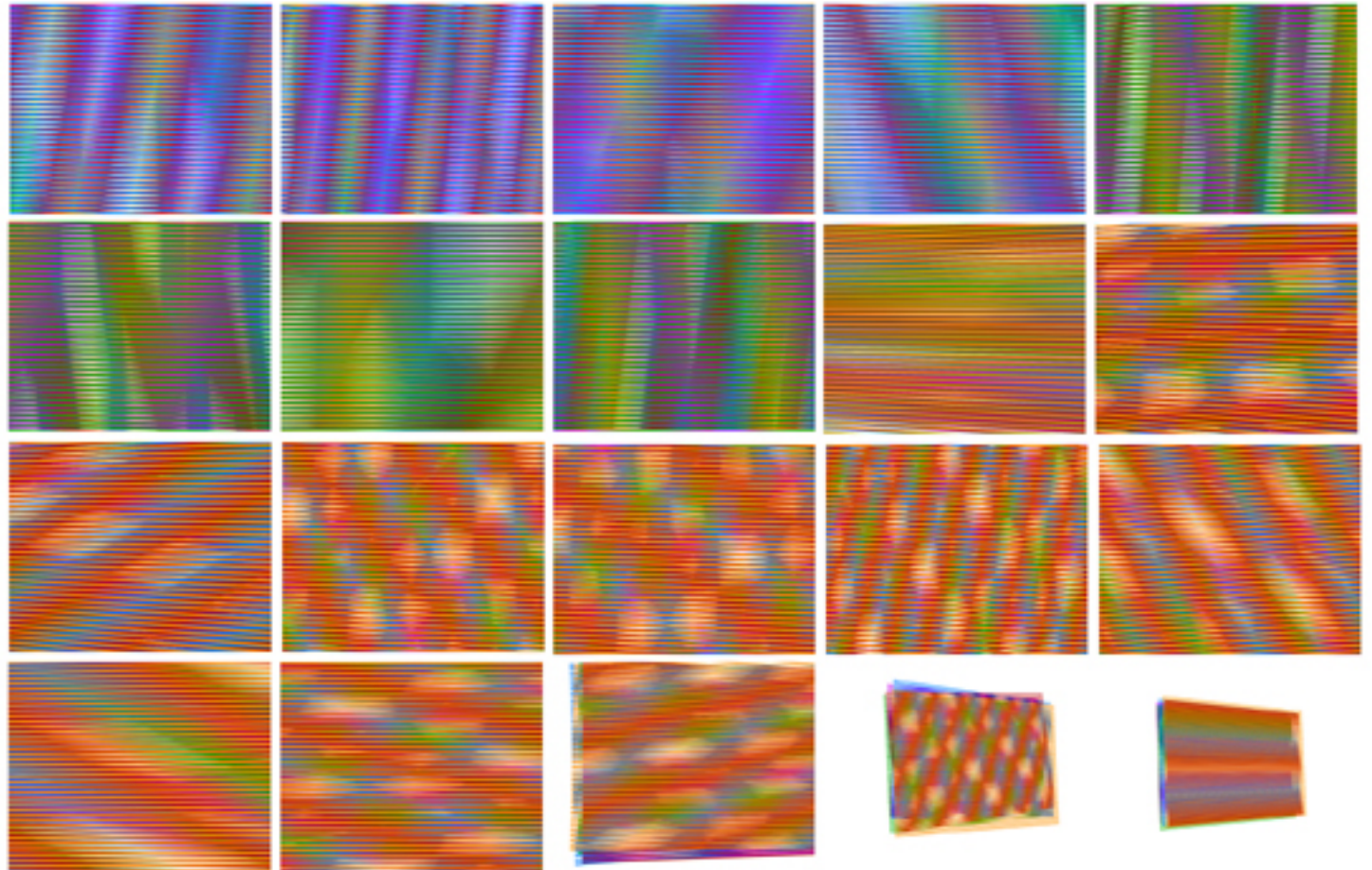


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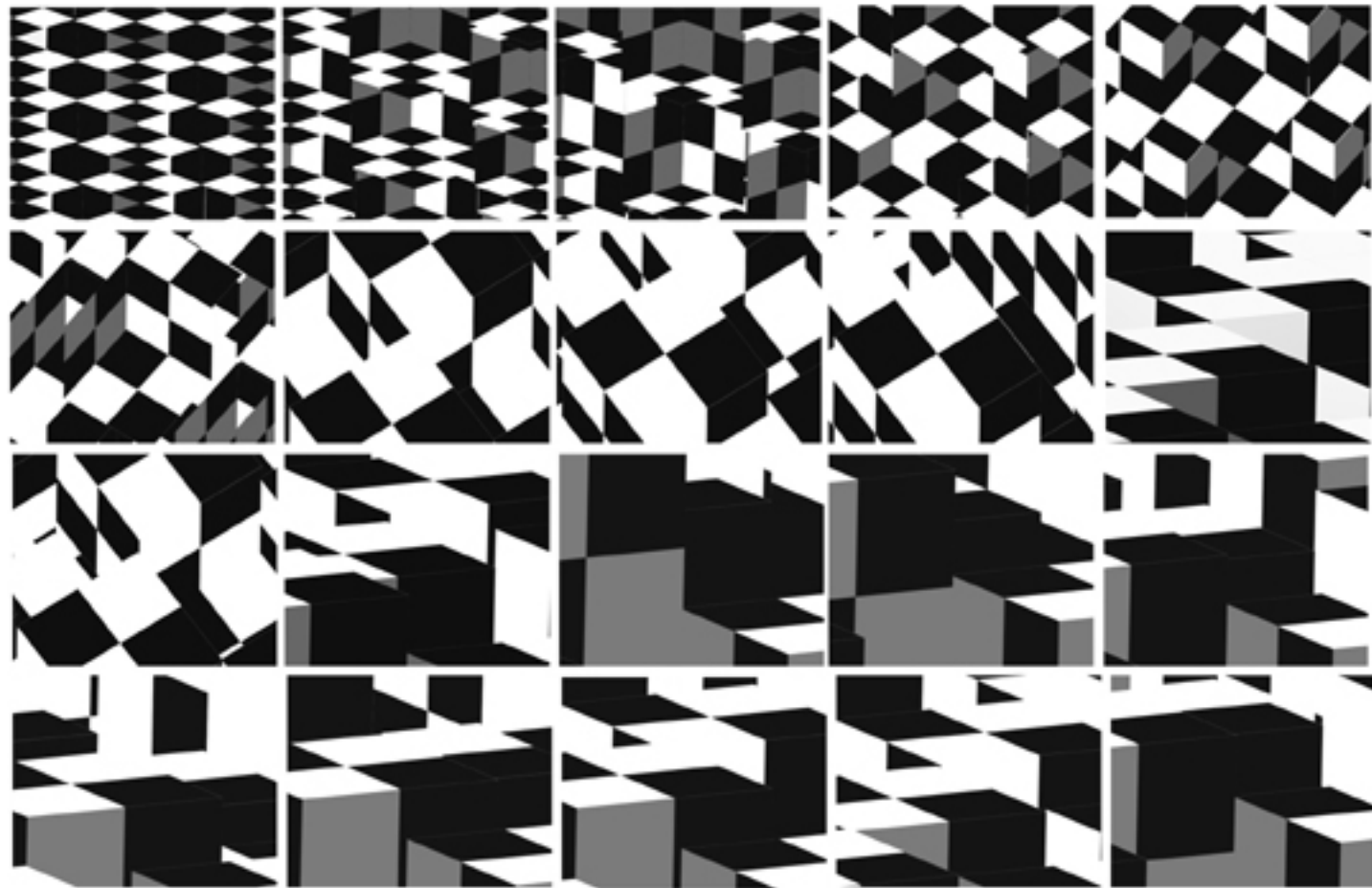


Visionary



Selected stills

Visionary

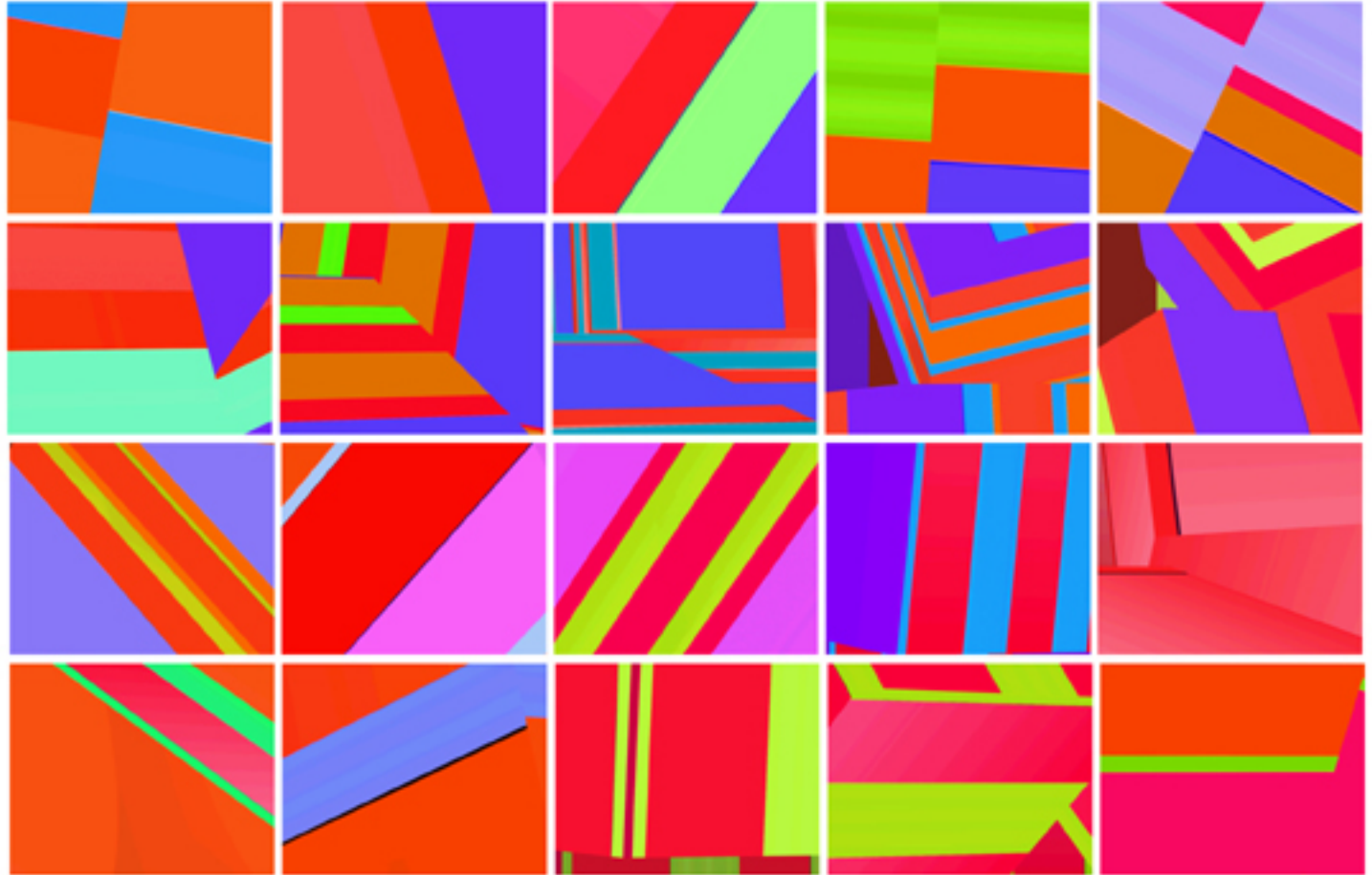


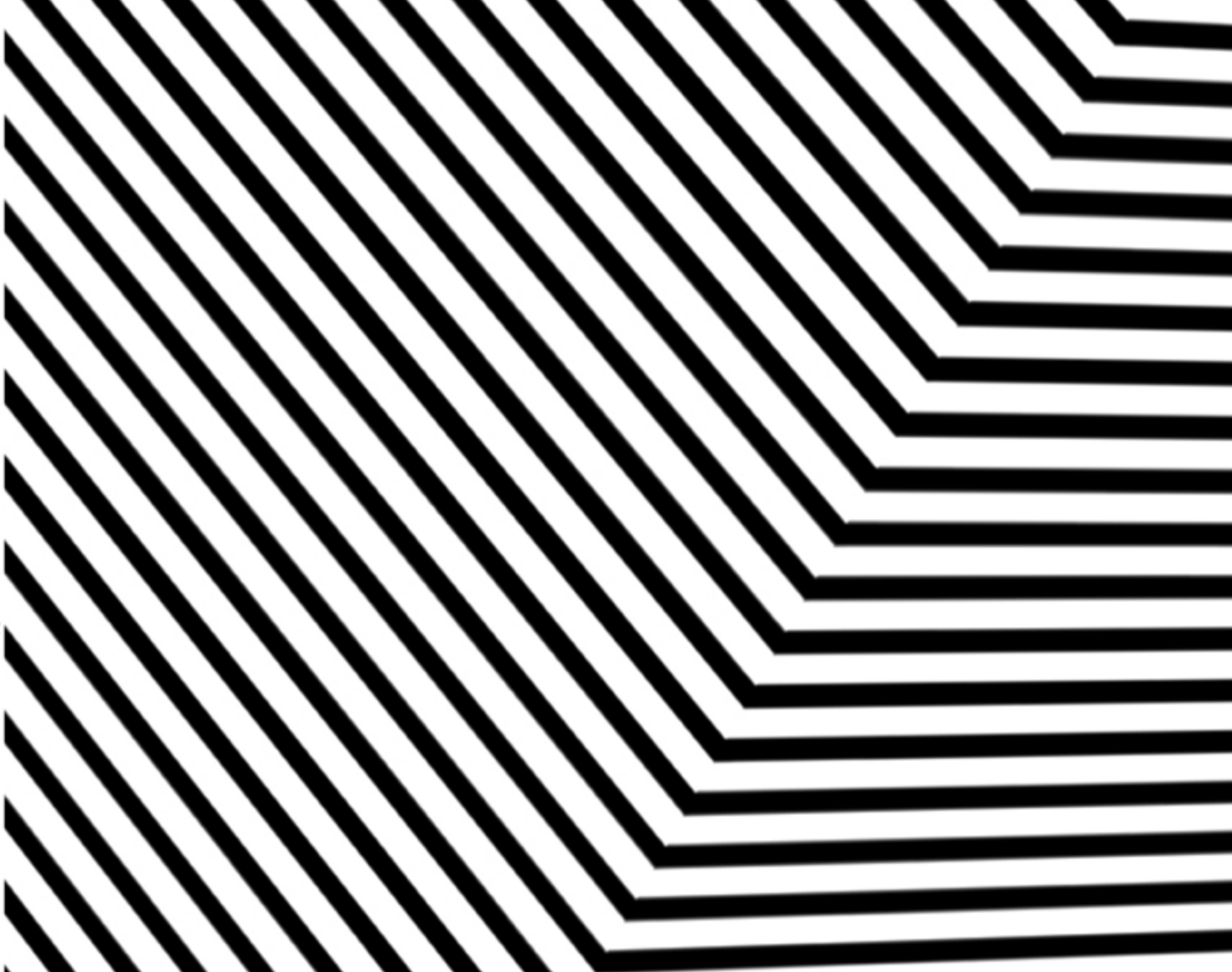
Interfude



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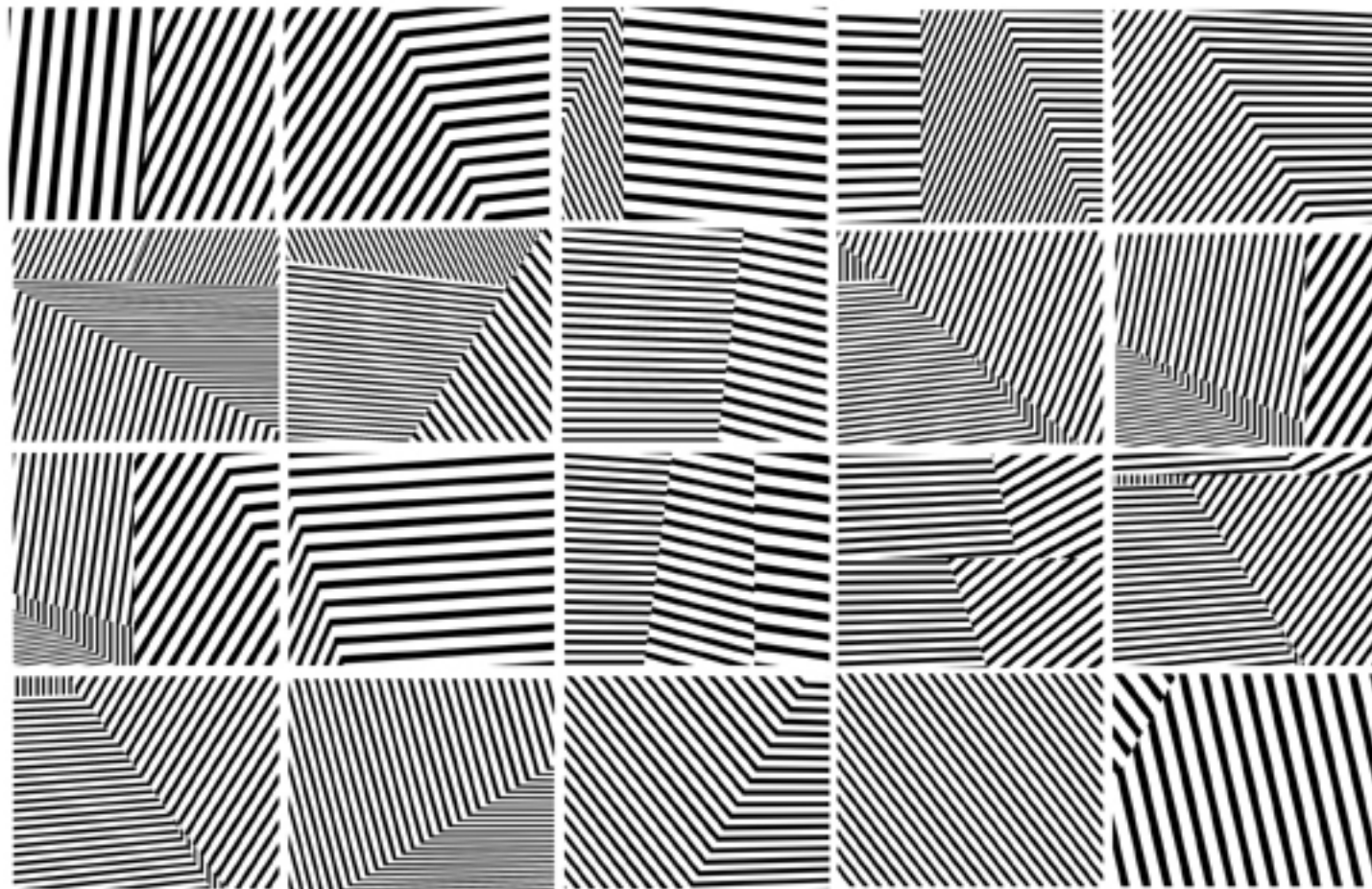
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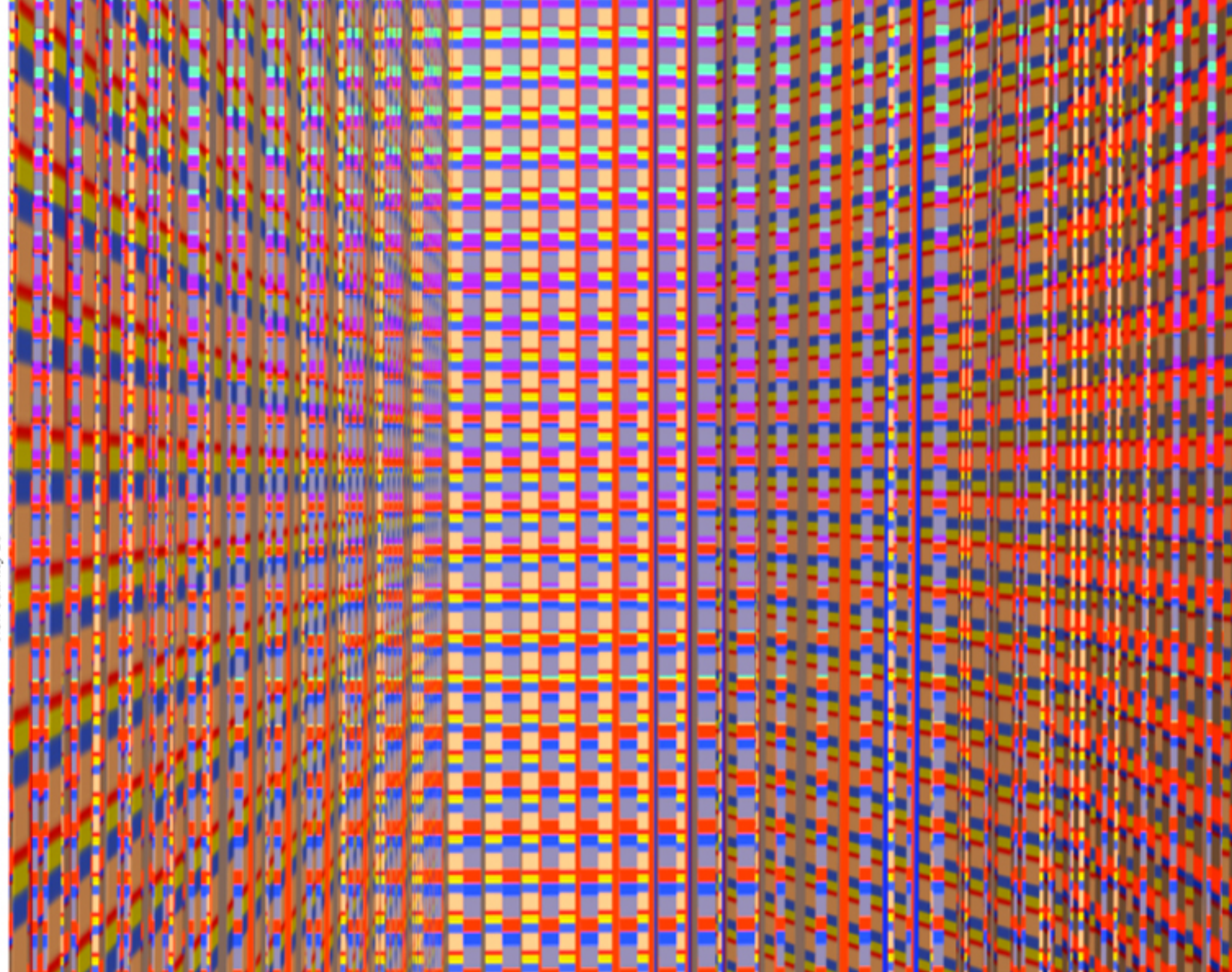




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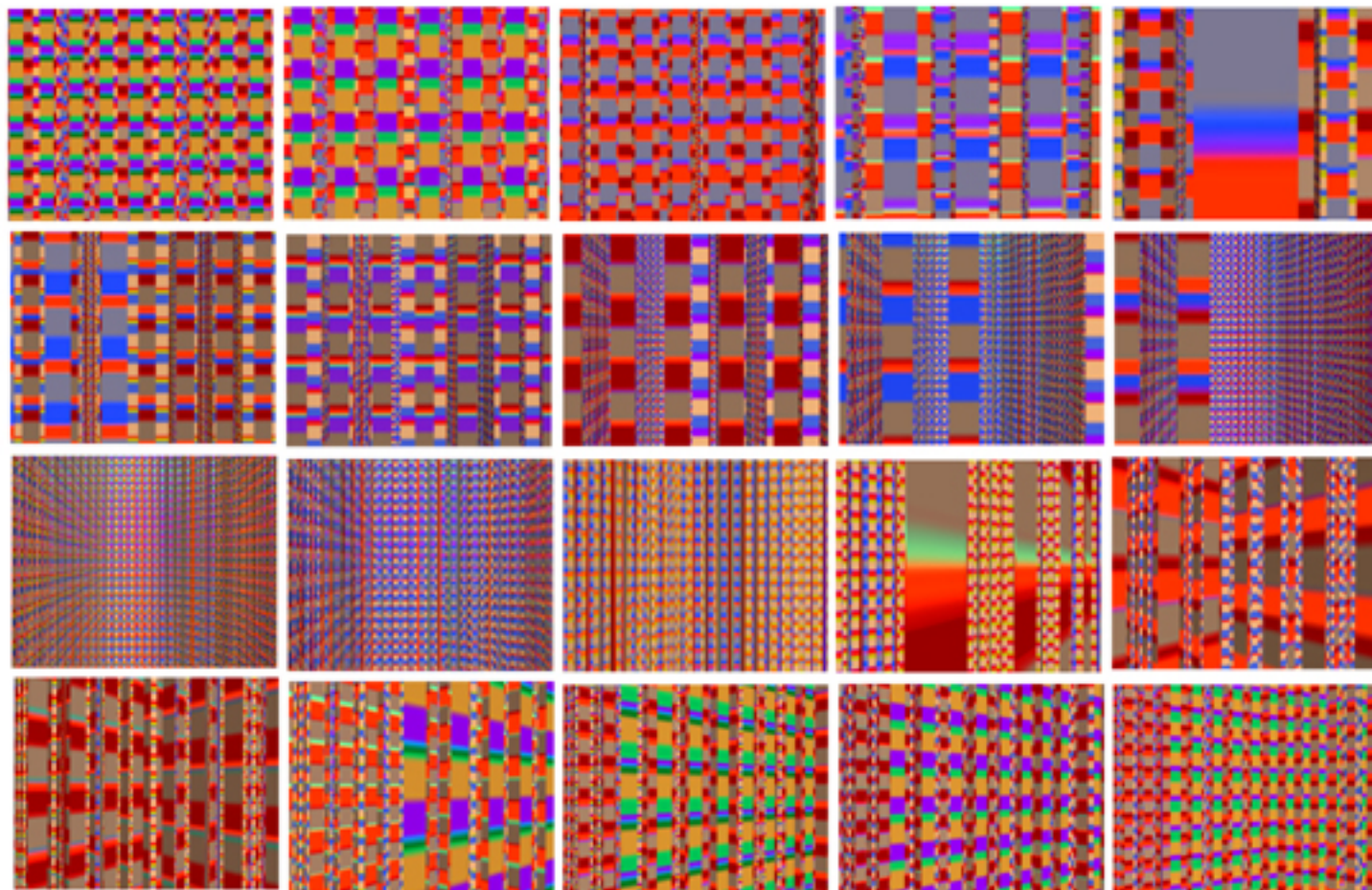
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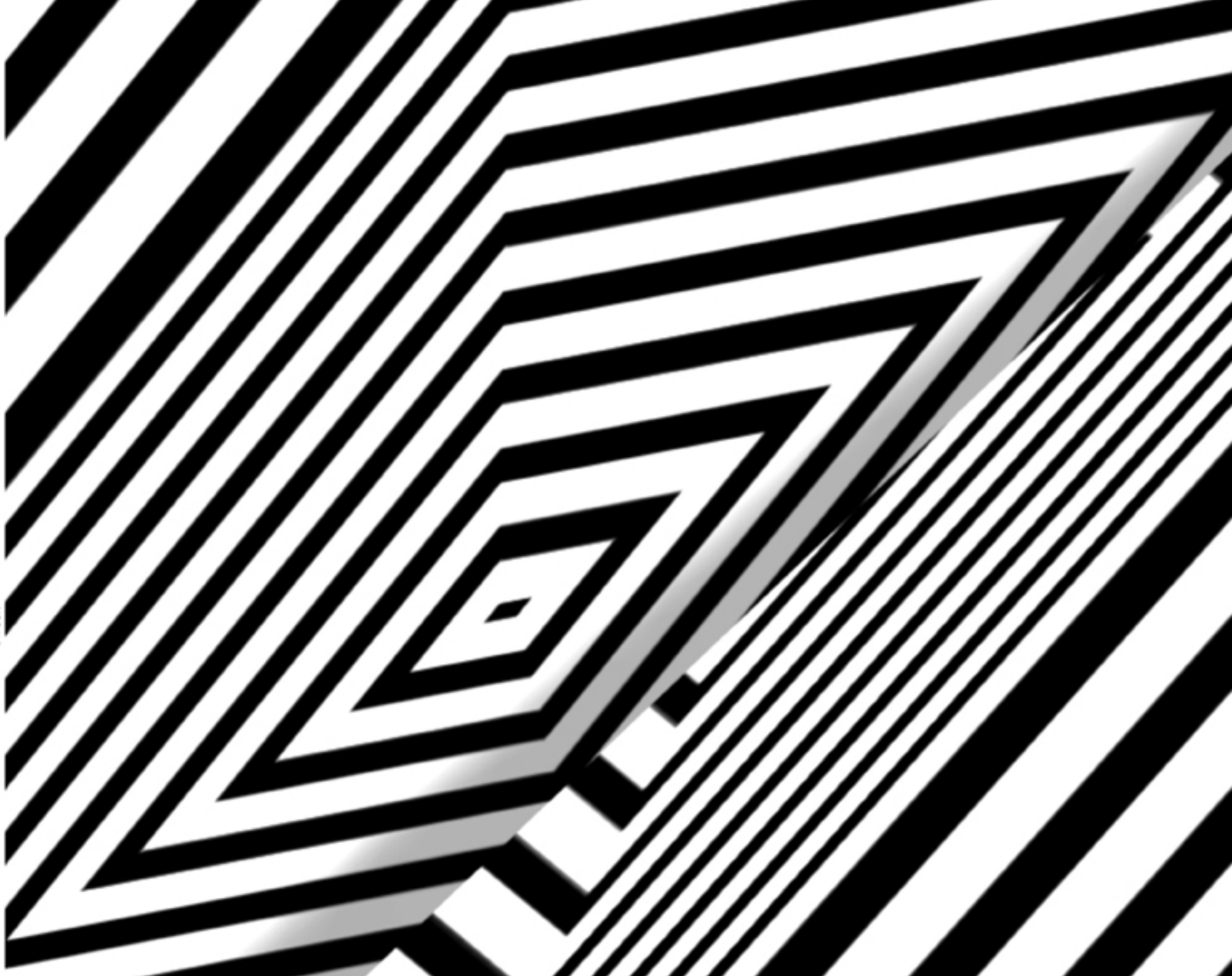


Selected stills

New Journey 26

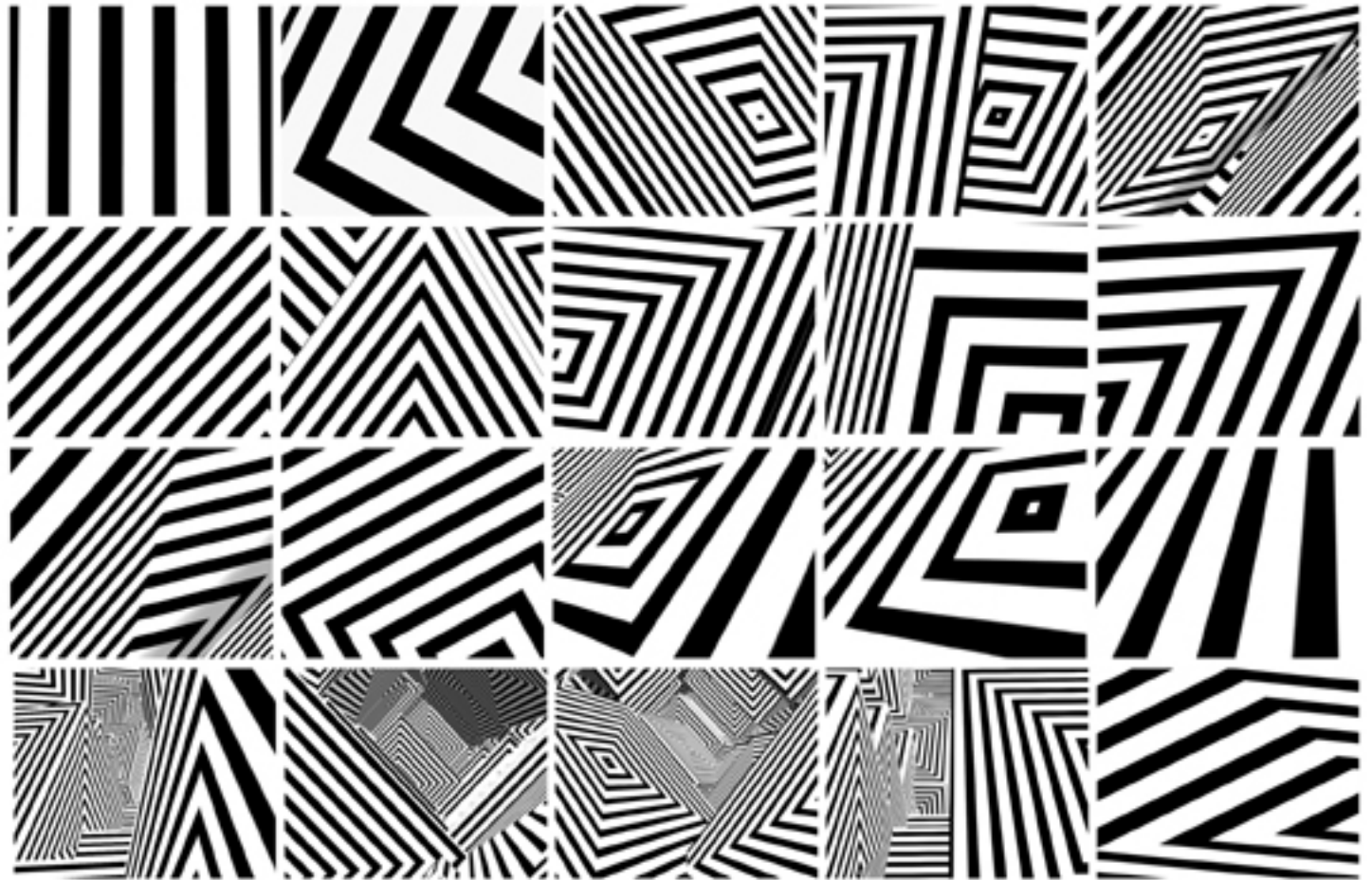


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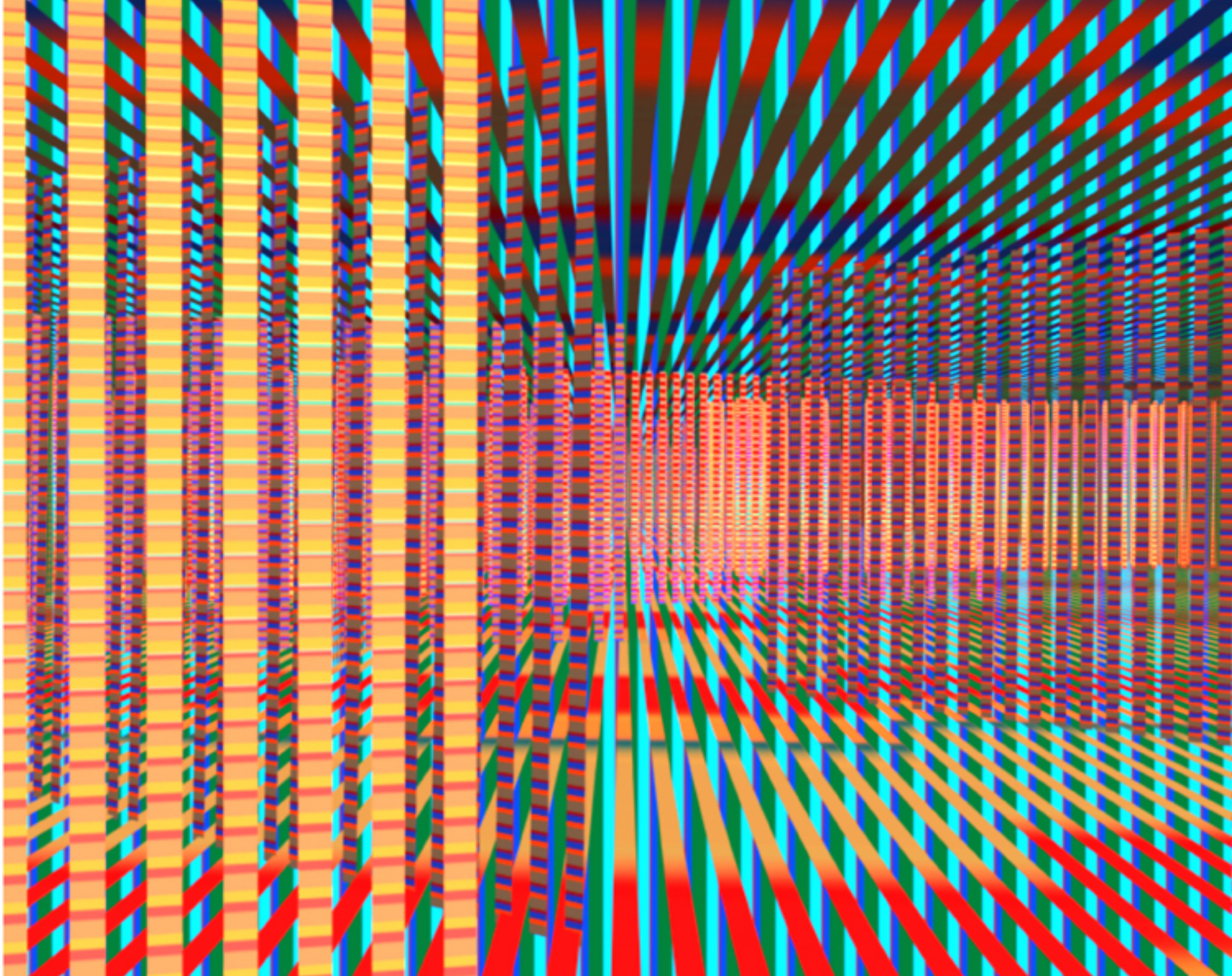


Selected stills

Tweek



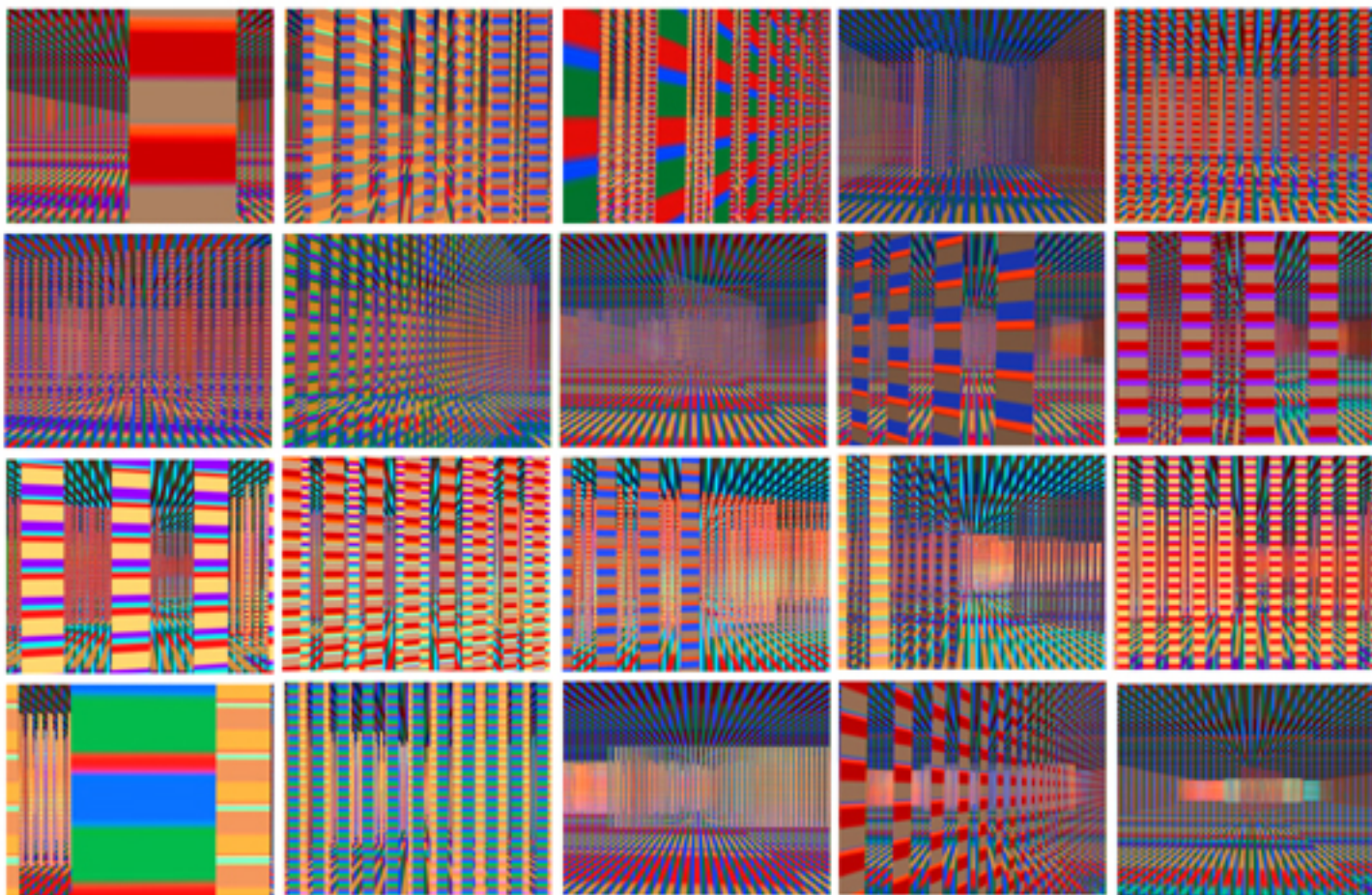
New Journey Long Way



Selected stills

New Journey

Long Way

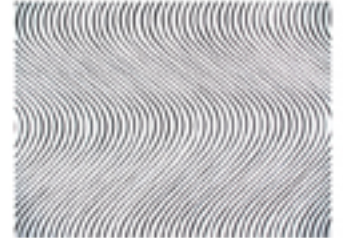
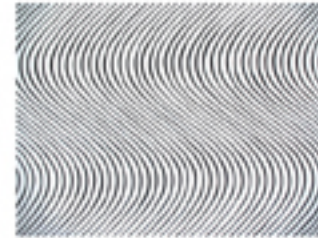
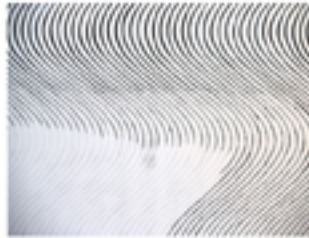


Painting
documentation

Acrylic on canvas
1500mm x 1200mm



Detail and work
in progress

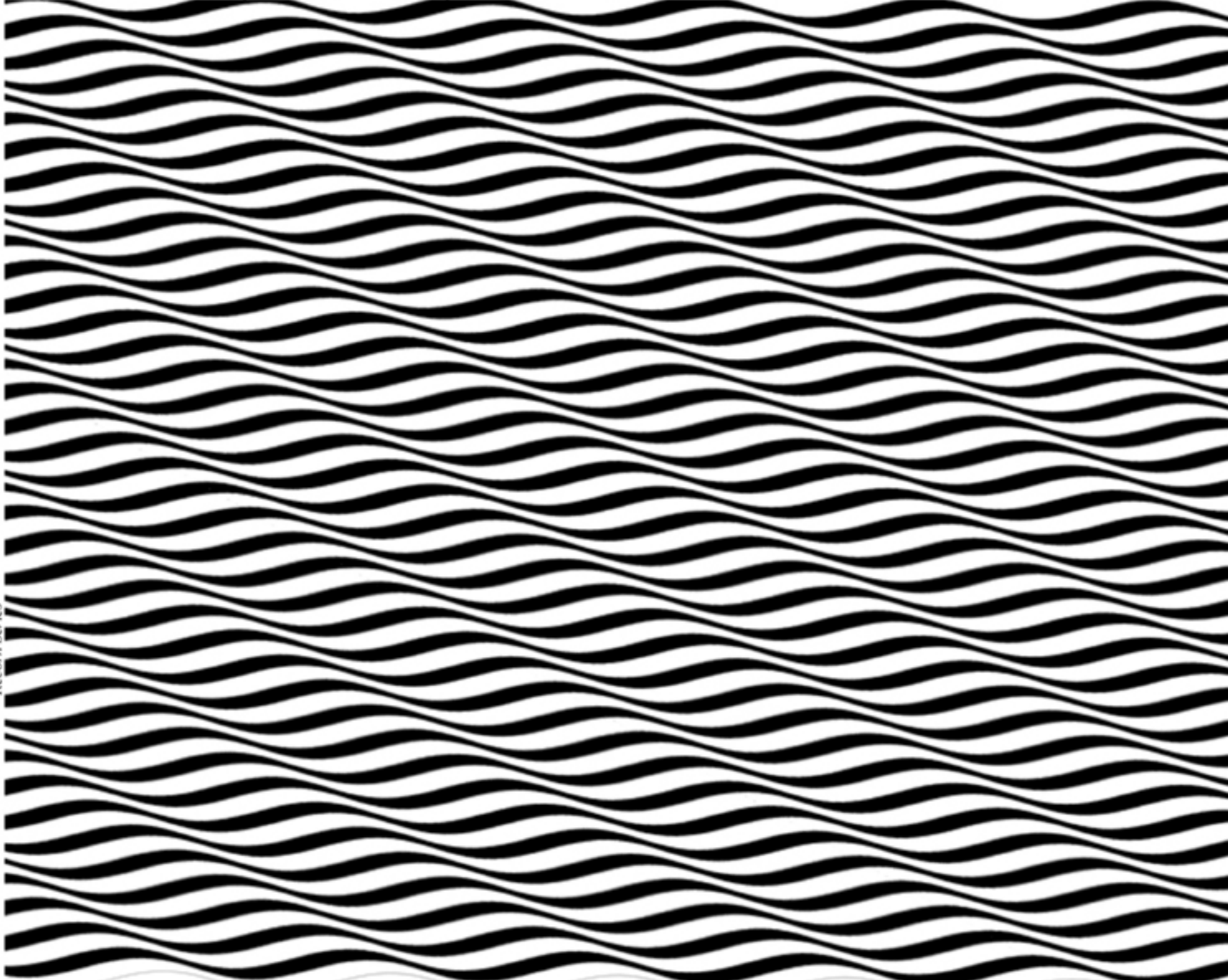


Kinetic sculpture
prototype
documentation

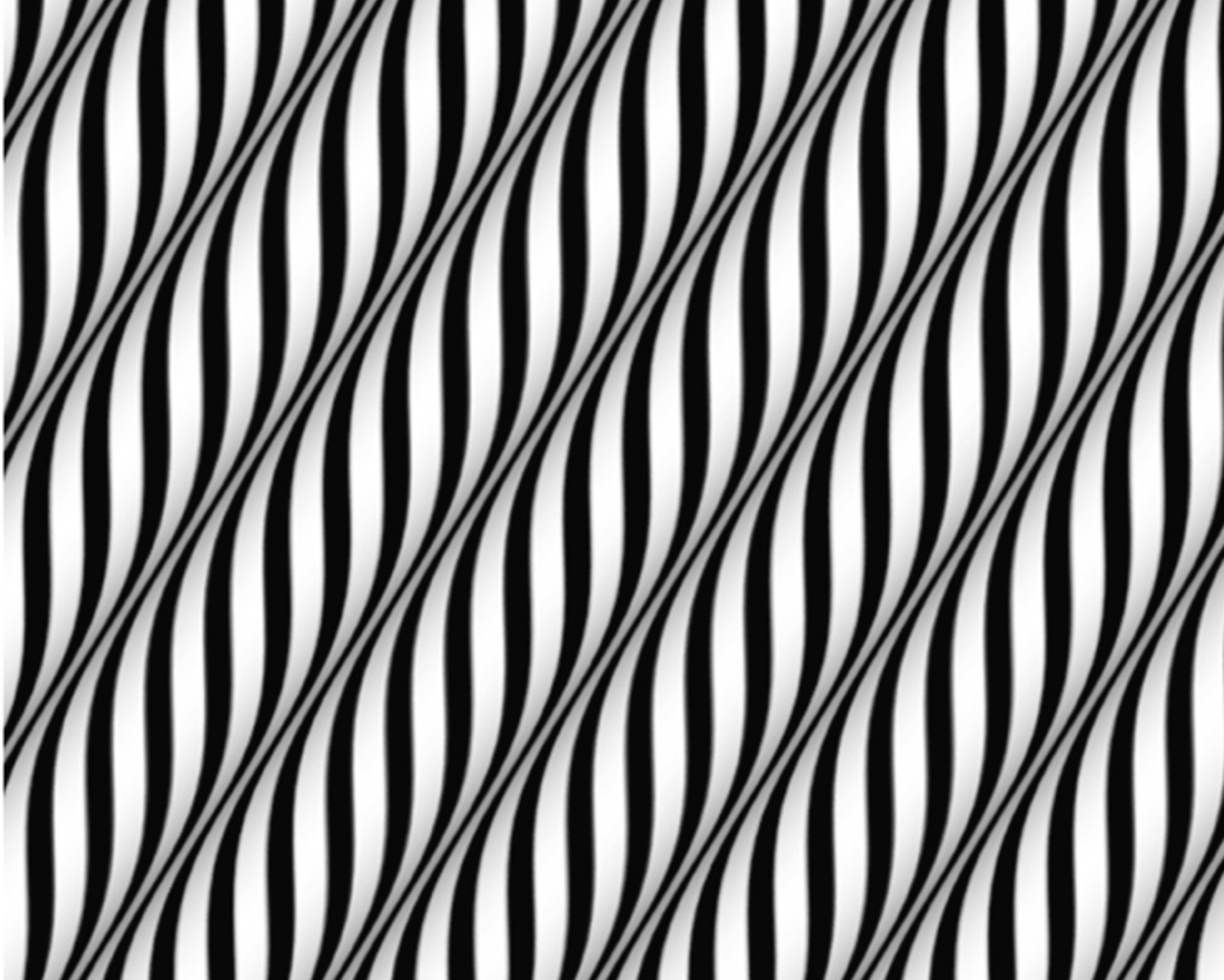
Video-still digital print
electric turntable
330mm h x 250mm diameter

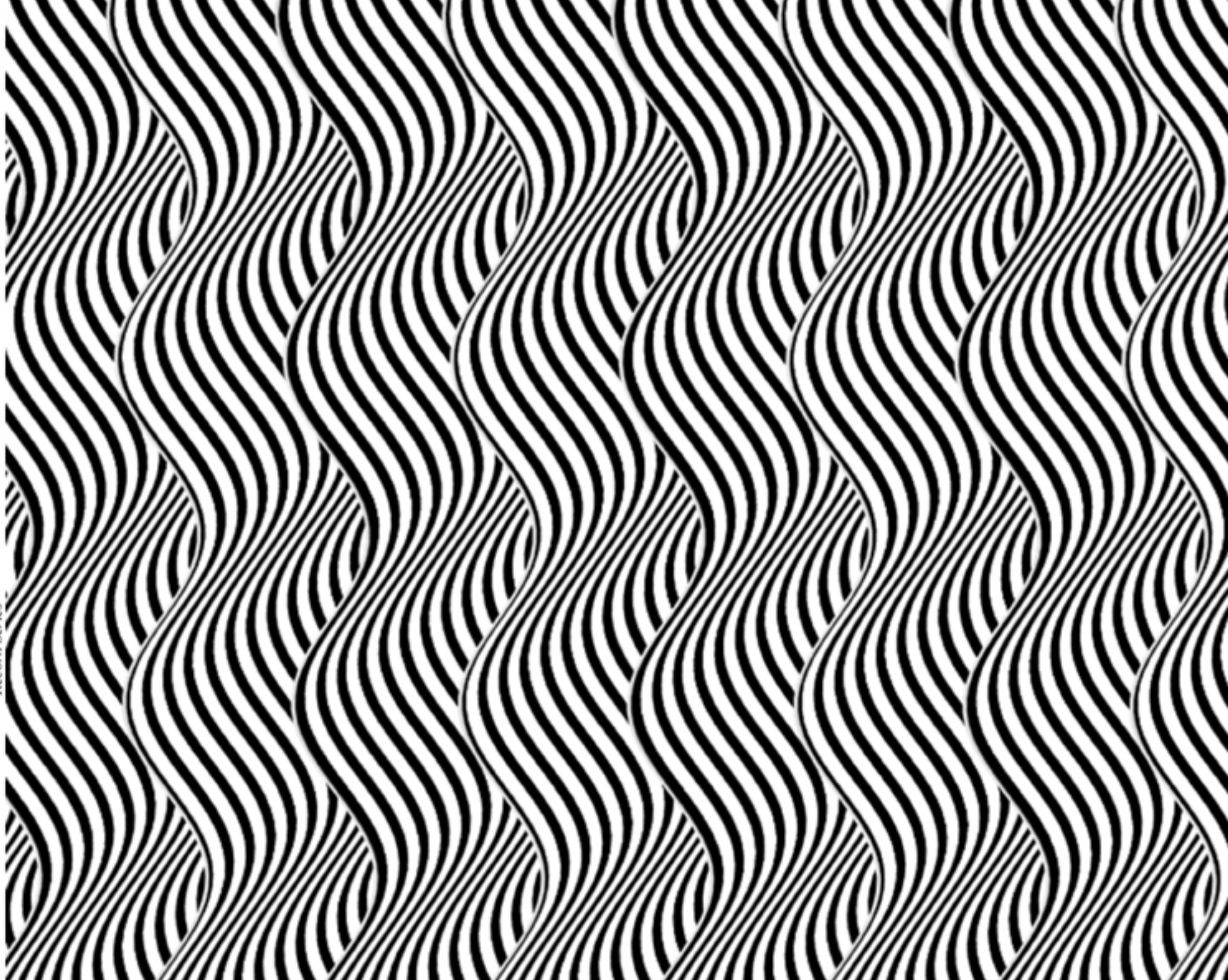


Recom Series



Reborn Series

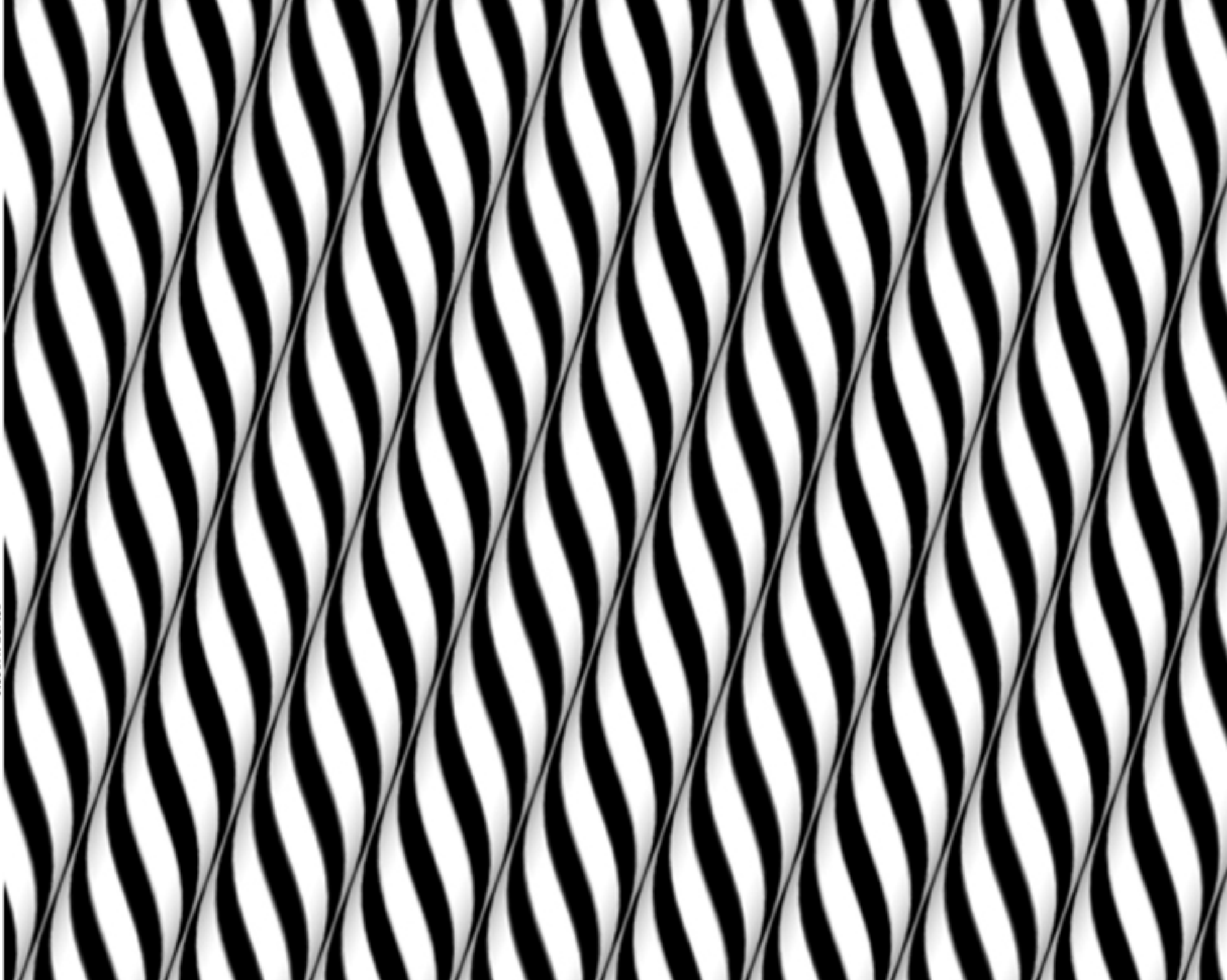




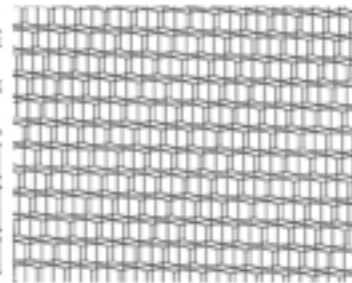
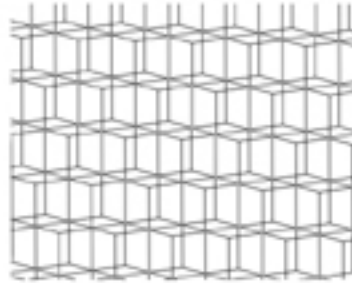
Reccorn Series



Reccorn Series



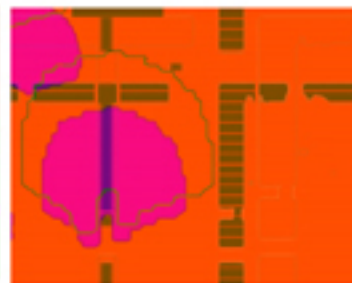
Project development
selected stills
from early works



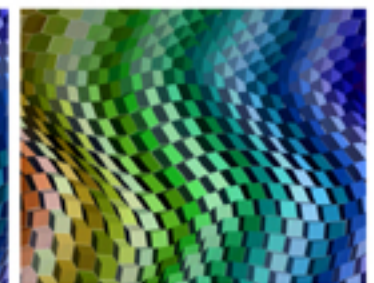
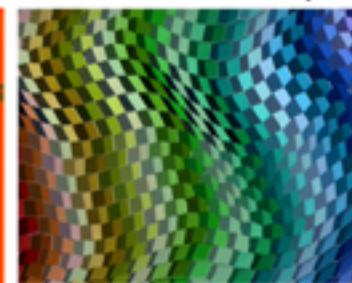
Wire series



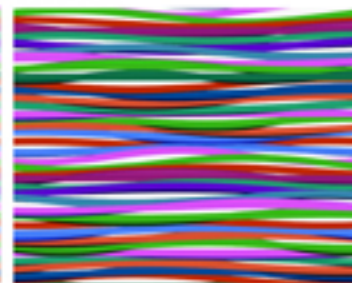
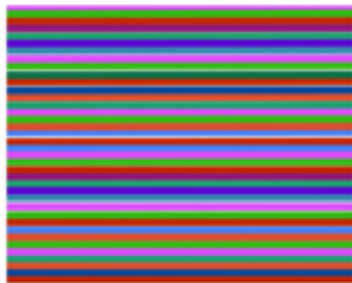
Cylinder series



Summa series



Hexagon series

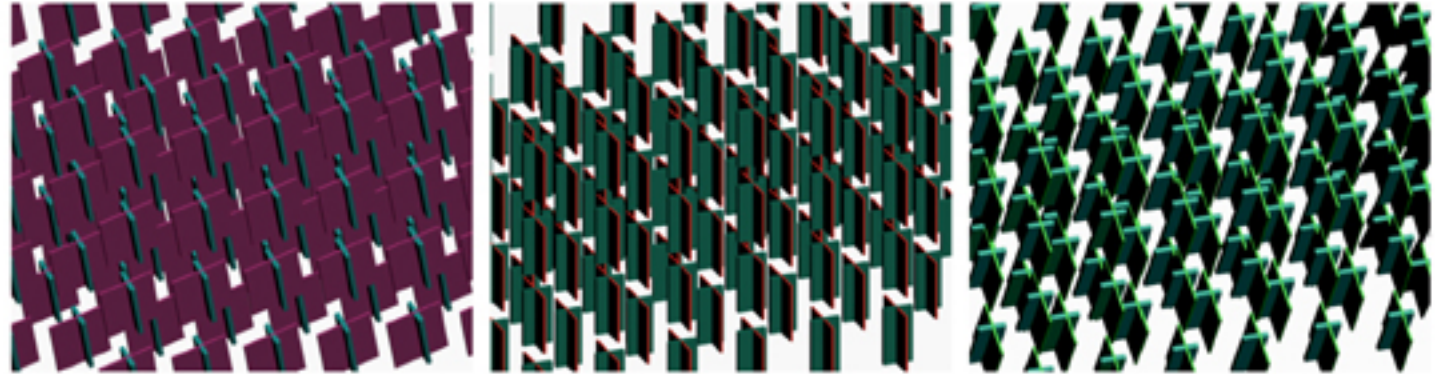


River series

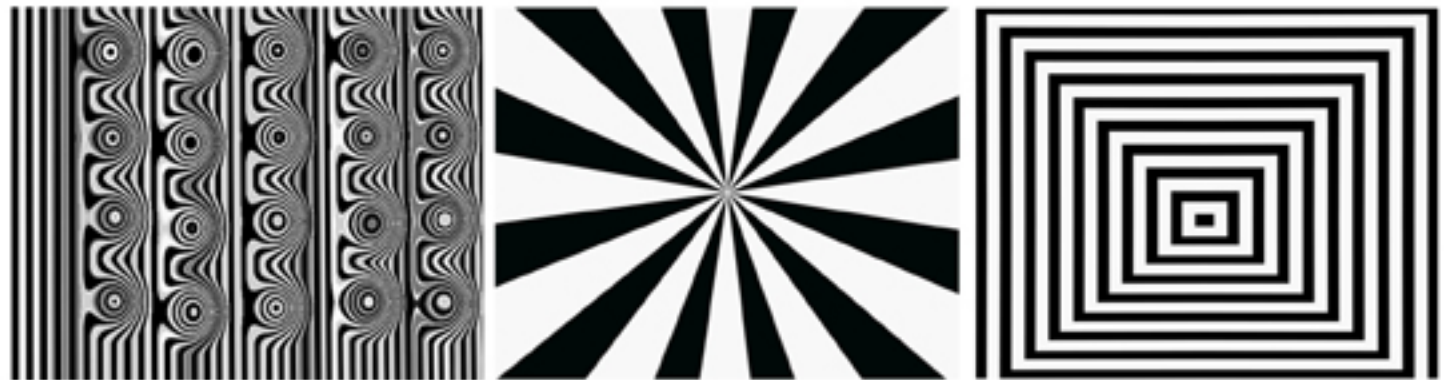


Journey series

Project development
selected stills
from early works



Early developmental works

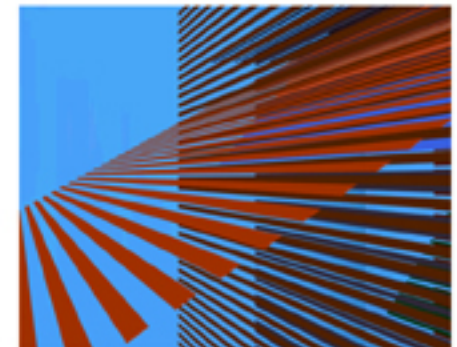
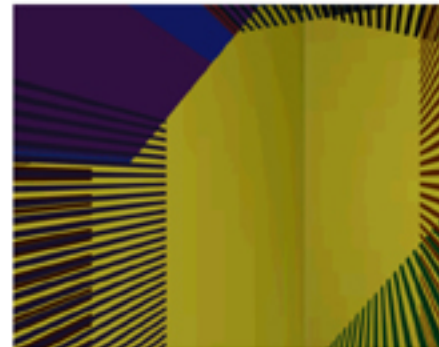
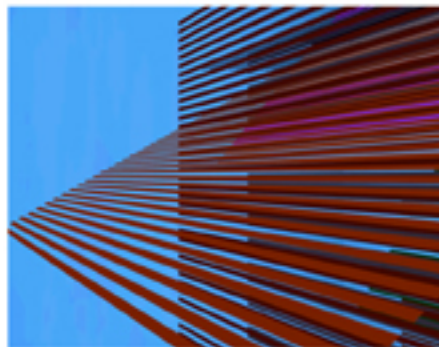
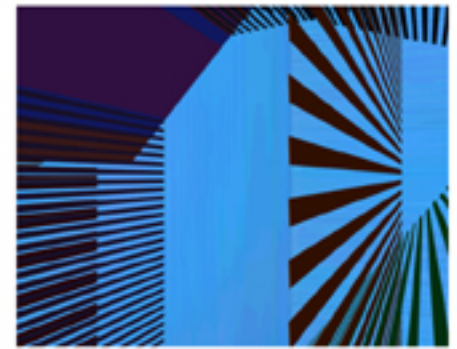
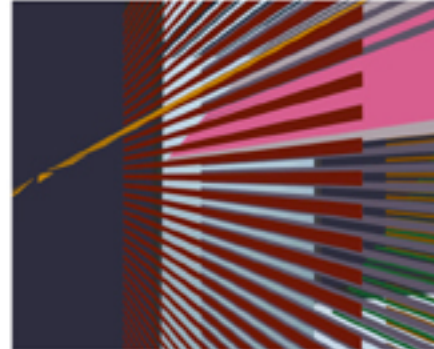
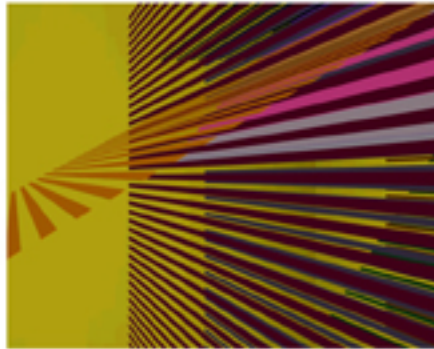


21 circles

Cylindac

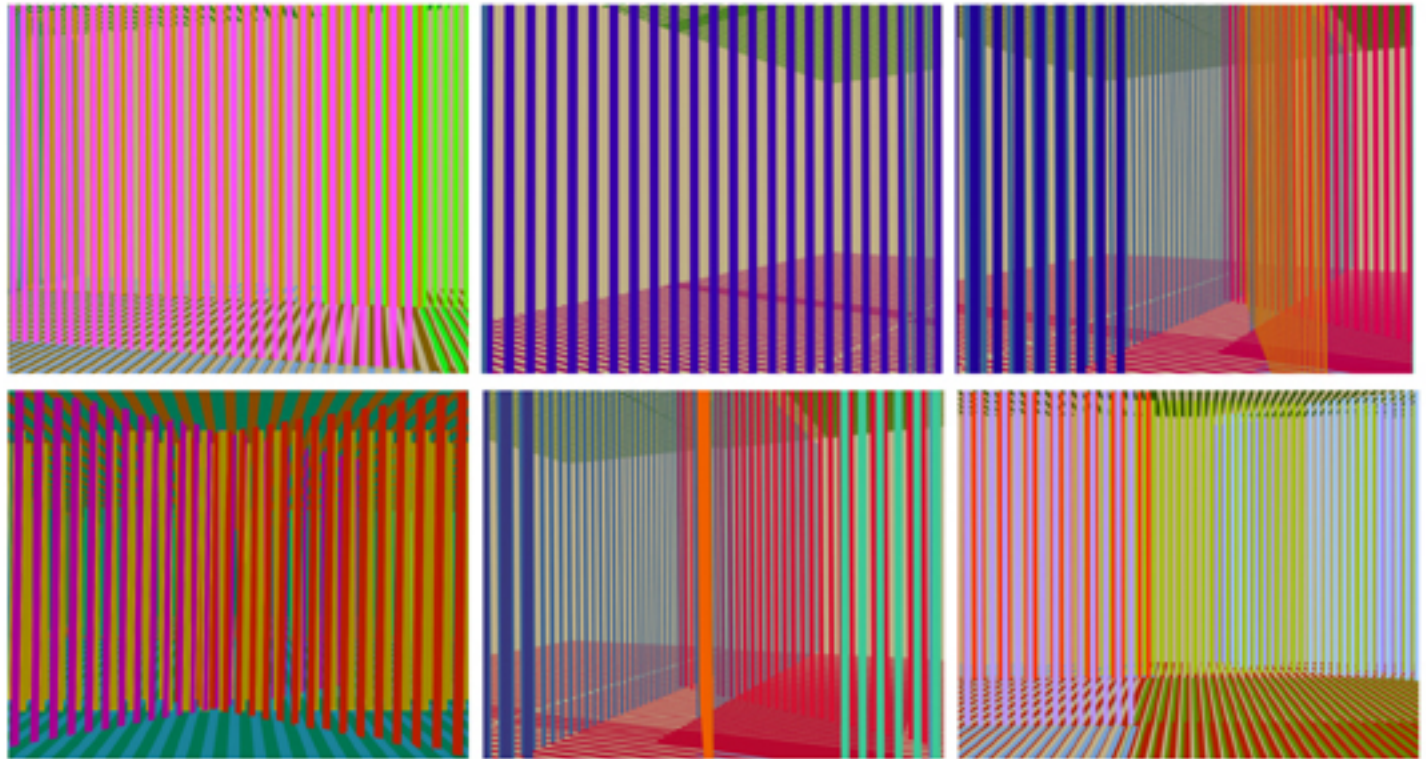
Vaser

Project development
selected stills
from early work
ct7a



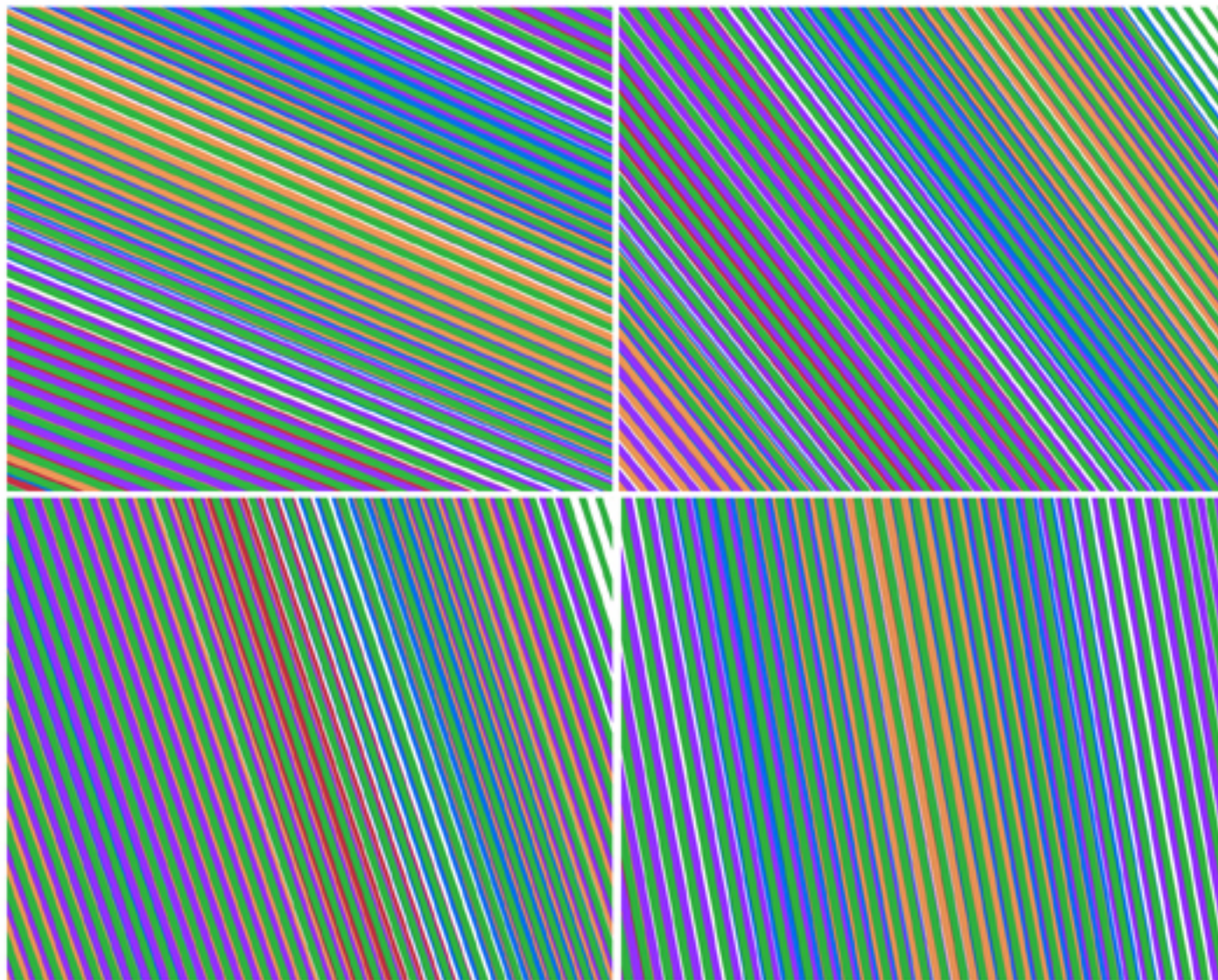
Project development
selected stills
from early work

multi series



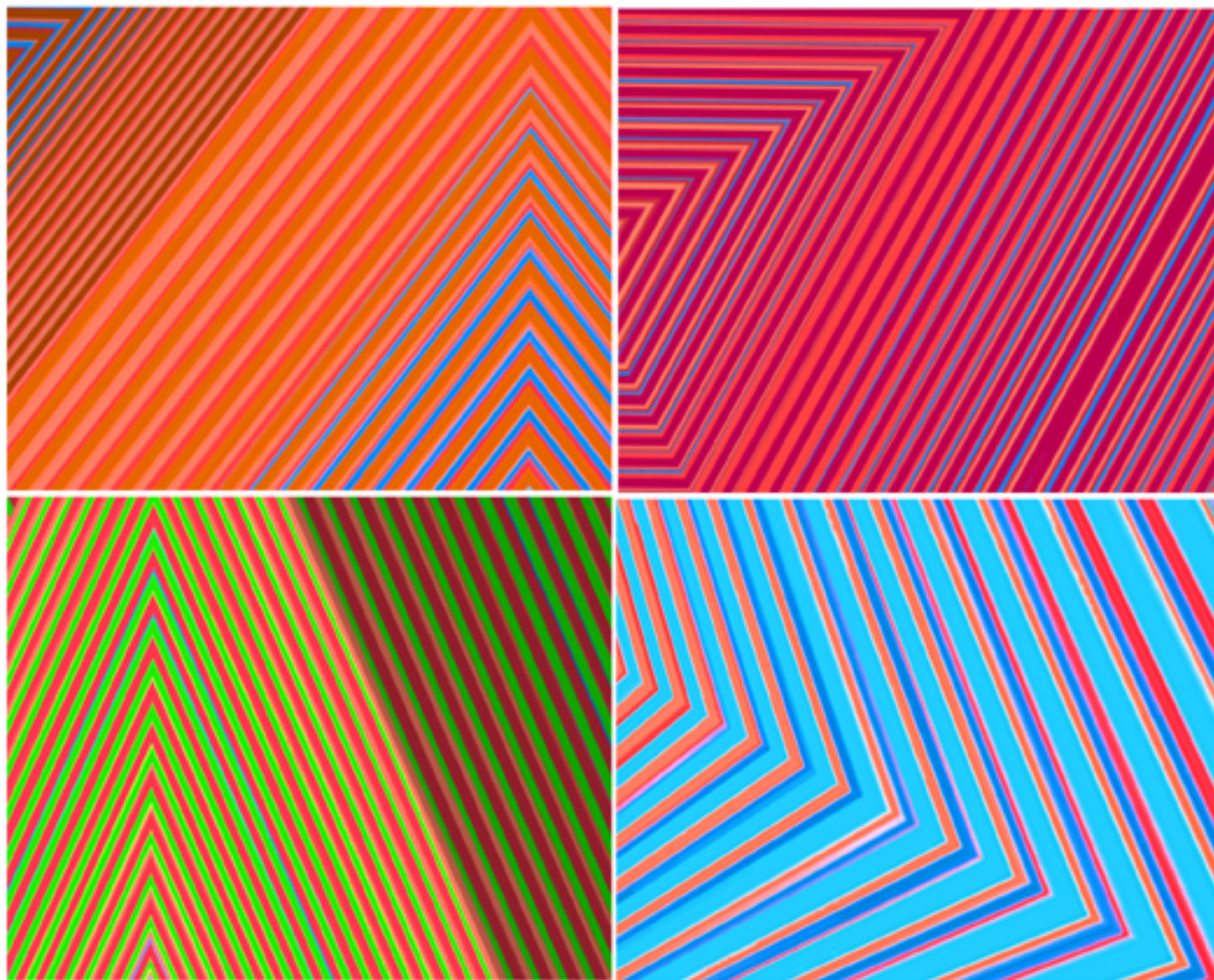
Project development
selected stills

up series



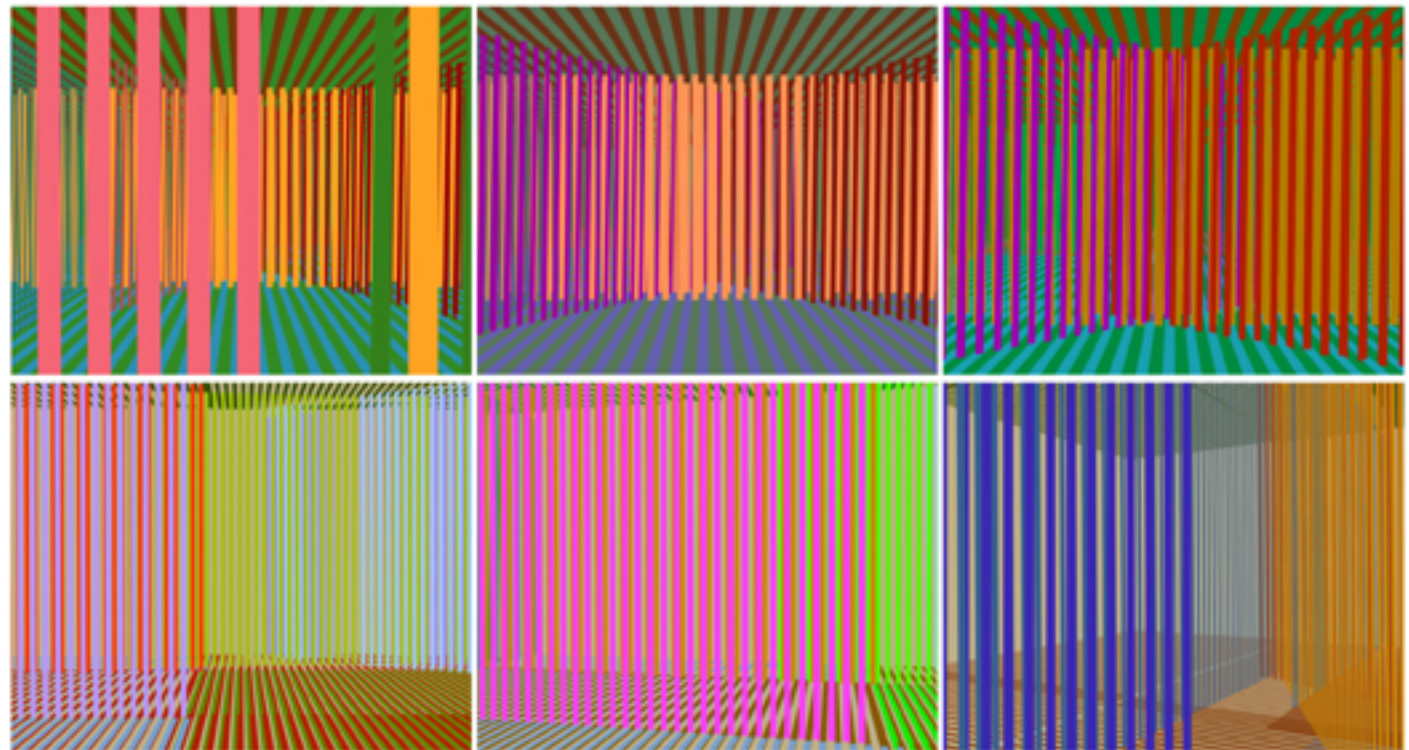
Project development
selected stills

Vpulse series



Project development
selected stills

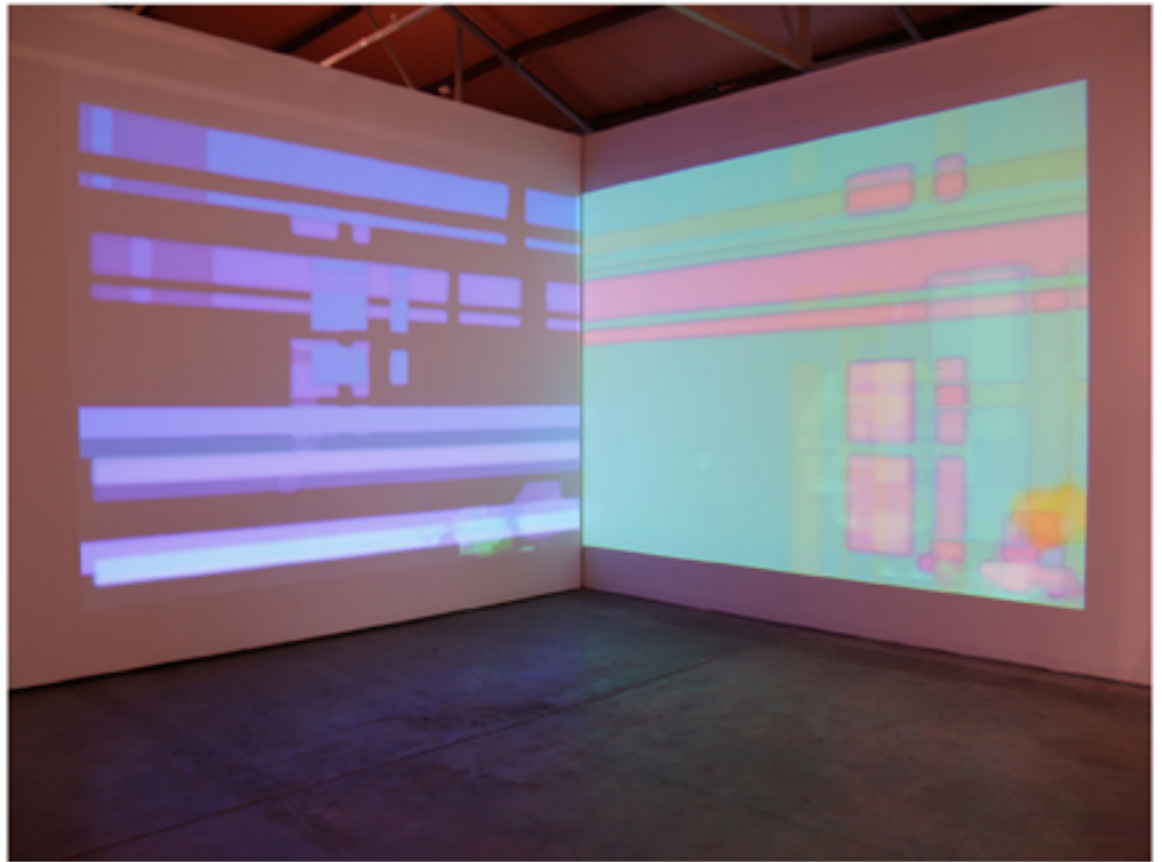
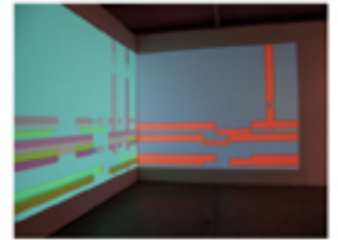
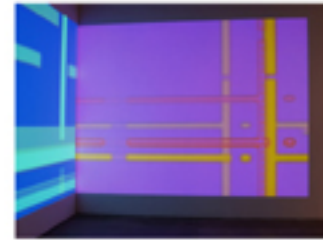
Multi series



Exhibition
documentation

Area Contemporary
Art Space

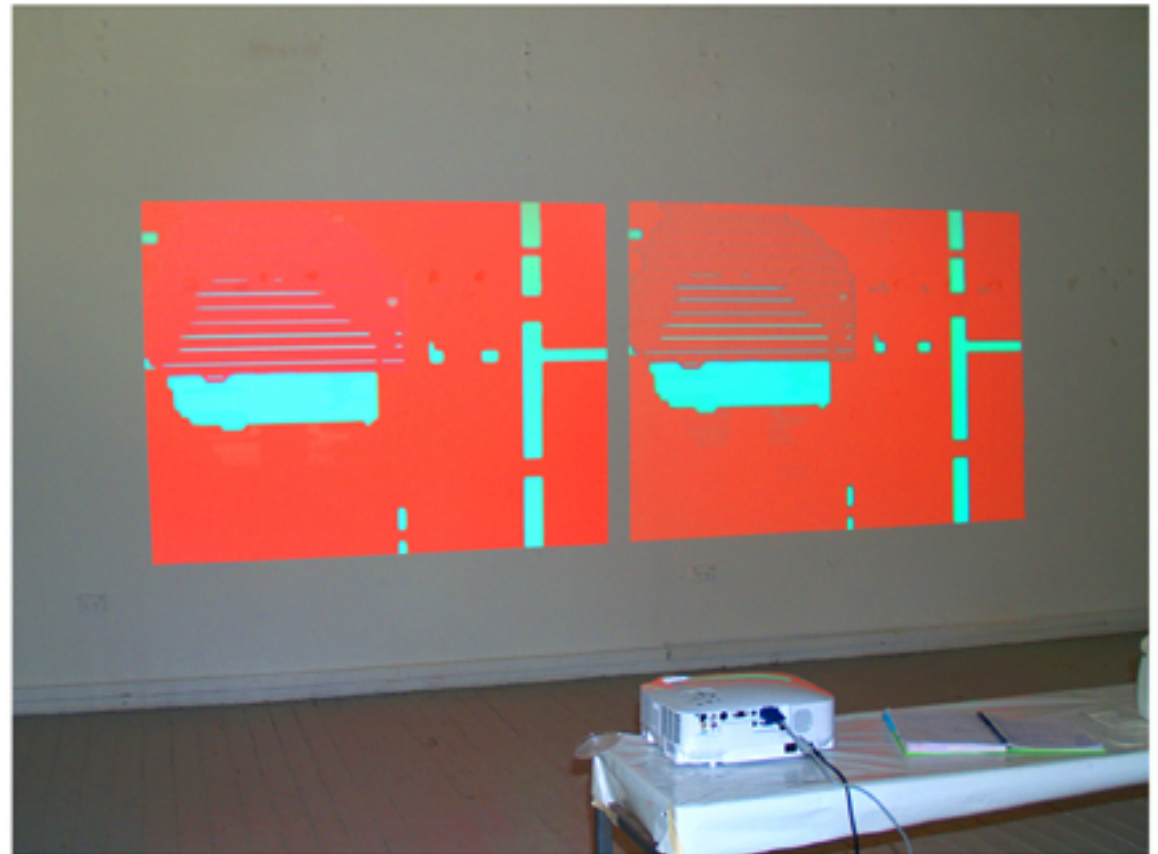
Large format dual
projections
4.5 x 4 mts approx.



Documentation

Gossard
Project Space

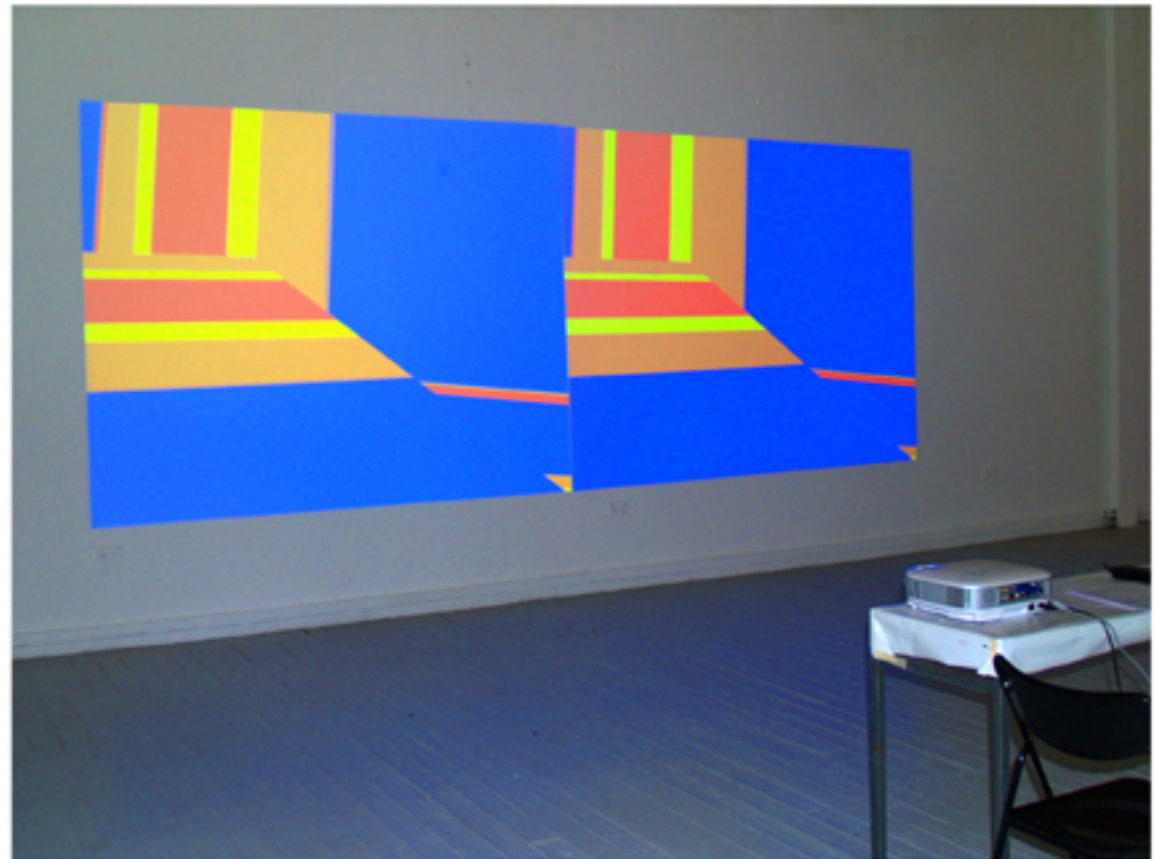
Dual projections
each approx.
2 x 2.5 mts.



Documentation

Gossard
Project Space

Dual projections
each approx.
2 x 2.5 mts.



Documentation

Gossard
Project Space
and studio

multiple, dual
and single
digital video
projections

large scale
approx 4 x 4.5 mts
small scale
approx 40 x 30 cms

